

This section, page 13

PHOTOGRAPH: GARY CAMERON

**Dangerous liaison, page 3;
Leader comment, page 12;
Hope to shame, page 13**

Employee's evidence today may doom Clinton □ Tapes detail 18-month sexual relationship he denies

A dangerous liaison too many

The affair: How Monica Lewinsky's dream soured

Joanna Coles in New York

TO HIS face and on the love notes she sent him — including one attached to a sexually provocative tape she had delivered to his office one evening by courier — Monica Lewinsky's nickname for the president was Schmuncky. To her friend Linda Tripp, in whom she confided about the affair for hours at a time, she referred to him as the "Big He". Later, when she realised the trouble she was in, she called him the "Big Creep".

At first, it must have seemed like a dream, or at the very least like the script from

Rob Reiner's film, *The American President*, in which Annette Bening playing an environmentalist activist, finds herself dating the president played by Michael Douglas. There was only one difference. In the film, the president was widowed. Hillary Clinton is very much alive, and Ms Lewinsky knew the relationship was doomed. It was why she spent so much time unburdening herself to Ms Tripp. According to her friend, the bubbly young intern, who had arrived armed with hope, ambition and a degree in psychology from Lewis and Clark College in Oregon, was in love.

How could she have known in November 1995, when she slipped on her revealing black dress and left her mother's apartment in the Watergate and headed for a White House party, that that night would be the start of an affair that might lead to the end of a presidency? Her charm and hard work as an intern for the chief of staff, Leon Panetta, had paid off and she had been given a junior secretarial job. The future must

have seemed stellar. "She was very, very ambitious, nothing would stop her," a former school classmate, Erin Lotz, observed.

She caught the president's eye as he was dancing. There was no looking back. Sometimes she would phone him six times in an hour and he would not reply; then, the next evening, he would call her at 2am. He would buy her dresses and ply her with photographs of him in black tie, standing in the Oval Office behind his desk. She would leave him letters and poems and, as the affair unfolded over the months, fabricate any excuse to visit his office — a fact which did not go unnoticed by the then deputy chief of White House staff, Evelyn Lieberman. After a run in, White House personnel arranged for her to be transferred to another \$32,000 position at the Pentagon.

Ms Tripp, a veteran civil servant, had already been working there for two years and the two women became firm, if ostensibly odd, friends. Ms Tripp, a divorcee



and single parent, aged 49, appeared to take a vicarious thrill from listening to Ms Lewinsky, aged 22, recounting her astonishing tales with a mixture of passion and distress. "She was a good, empathetic listener," said a colleague. Others noted that Ms Lewinsky would often discuss her personal life out loud, once announcing to no one in

How could she manage to keep her liaison with the president a secret, Monica Lewinsky was asked by her friend at the Pentagon, Linda Tripp, left, who taped their conversations. 'I have lied my entire life,' Ms Lewinsky shrugged

particular that she had had a brief liaison with a high-ranking Pentagon official.

But her affair with the president allegedly continued; their liaisons taking place in the late afternoon or occasionally at weekends, when she would slip into the White House, her presence logged only by secret service agents and the president's private secretary, Bettie Currie.

Once, in the middle of the day, the two lovers disappeared into the small study off the Oval Office.

But how could she manage to keep the affair a secret, Ms Tripp, who started taping their conversations last August, once asked? "I have lied my entire life," Ms Lewinsky shrugged. The affair was not to last, however. Mr Clinton seemed

bored and Paula Jones's lawyers were determined to use other women's experiences to suggest a pattern of sexual harassment. Terrified she would be questioned under oath, Ms Lewinsky was desperate for him to end the Jones case, but "he won't settle," she told Ms Tripp. "He's in denial." Later on, frightened that she might have to admit to the president that she had told other people about their affair, she groaned: "If I do that, I'm just going to kill myself."

By mid-December, Ms Tripp told Ms Lewinsky that she would have to testify herself and that she was not prepared to lie. She would tell Ms Jones's lawyers that she knew Ms Lewinsky had been having a long-standing affair with Mr Clinton. Still unaware that her supposed friend had been taping their conversations, Ms Lewinsky begged her not to, and said she had been taking advice from the president's friend, Vernon Jordan, who had told her to lie on her affidavit. Mr Clinton had also told her to deny the affair. Without photographs, he had

suggested, no one could prove a thing. "This is what I signed up for when I began the relationship," she reassured him.

After Christmas, seeking a move to New York, Ms Lewinsky was offered a job with Revlon, referred by a director of the firm which owns the cosmetics company. She was also interviewed by the ambassador to the United Nations, Bill Richardson, who yesterday issued an odd denial that the president had set the job up. In the event, she turned it down, planning a new life in the private sector. Last Saturday, as the president sat facing Ms Jones's lawyers, denying he had harassed her or had an affair with Ms Lewinsky, his ex-mistress was packing her apartment alone. Fewer than 24 hours earlier, she had been informed that Ms Tripp had been taping their conversations and that Kenneth Starr, the special independent investigator, was now investigating her.

There are no tapes to record her reply. Today she will face the lawyers again.

'I'll deny it so he will not get screwed but I'm not going to get screwed personally'



Monica Lewinsky: Considered telling Clinton their secret was out to make him settle with Paula Jones

Crisis casts shadow over Middle East peace talks

The fallout: Consequences for stand-off with Iraq

Martin Kettle in Washington

ABESIEGED Bill Clinton tried to ignore his domestic political crisis in two hours of talks at the White House yesterday morning with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, but Mr Arafat's aides privately admitted that Washington's latest sex scandal was hindering any chance of a US-backed breakthrough in the Middle East peace talks.

The Palestinian leader emerged to tell reporters that Mr Clinton was "willing to press ahead" with the peace process in further talks last night. However, Israeli leaders made little effort to conceal that they believe the allegations against Mr Clinton severely weaken his ability to lever concessions from Israel. In another test of the effect of the crisis on the US diplomatic position, the United Nations Security Council meets in New York today to hear a report from the chief UN weapons inspector, Richard Butler, about Iraq's continuing interference with UN teams looking for details of Baghdad's chemical and biological arsenal.

UN sources admitted yesterday that Mr Clinton's embroilment will "certainly not make it any easier" for the US and Britain to carry the security council in support of tough measures to secure Iraqi compliance with UN resolutions, though officials said the unity of the five permanent members is not yet threatened by it.

The two situations highlight the immediate destructive effect of the president's problems upon the US's international standing. Like every US president before him, Mr Clinton knows that the immense wealth and weaponry of the US guarantee that its superpower status cannot be seriously deflected by scandals in the White House. But this week's events in Washington are having an impact on world events nevertheless, especially in the Middle East.

Before yesterday's White House meeting, Mr Arafat's entourage was briefing journalists that the festering crisis could weaken Mr Clinton's international leverage.

Israel's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, had already made his contempt for Mr Clinton clear during his own Washington visit this week by meeting some of the president's most virulent critics, including Christian Coalition leader Pat Robertson and Moral Majority leader Jerry Falwell, and by publicly snubbing the administration over the West Bank. His confidence in defying the US will have been boosted by the atmosphere in Washington. Even in less high-profile

contexts, the change in Mr Clinton's fortunes is having serious consequences. In two weeks, Tony Blair makes his first official visit to Washington since taking office. The event has been planned as a celebration of the relationship between Mr Clinton and Mr Blair, but any idea that it would enable Mr Blair to bask in Mr Clinton's radiance can now be scrapped.

If anything, the domestic political consequences of the crisis are even more serious. If the latest accusations had not surfaced this week, Mr Clinton would have been using his media opportunities to pave the way for what the White House has been billing as a ground-breaking State of the Union address next Tuesday. Mr Clinton's speech is expected to focus on the opportunities for governmental action which are opened up by the administration's balancing the federal budget for the first time since 1969.

All this will have an impact

'No affair'

ASKED in a TV interview with Jim Lehrer whether it was true that he "suborned perjury by encouraging a 24-year-old woman former White House intern to lie under oath in a civil deposition about her having an affair with him," the president replied:

"That is not true. That is not true. I did not ask anyone to tell anything other than the truth. There is no improper relationship..."

Q: No improper relationship? — define what you mean by that.

A: Well, I think you know what it means. It means there is not a sexual relationship, an improper sexual relationship or any other kind of improper relationship.

Q: You had no sexual relationship with this young woman?

A: There is not a sexual relationship; that is accurate. Q: You had no conversations with this young woman about her testimony or possible testimony...

A: I did not urge anyone to say anything untrue.

at the start of a year in which the Democratic Party hopes to recapture control of the House of Representatives from Newt Gingrich's Republicans in November's midterm elections. A Democratic Congress would give Mr Clinton two final years in which to leave a tangible presidential legacy.

Ironically, this may guarantee Mr Clinton some protection from yesterday's premature talk about impeachment. The Republican majority in the Congress may want to humiliate Mr Clinton, but they may think twice if humiliating him means conferring the presidency on Vice-President Al Gore, putting Mr Gore in a strong position to win the election of 2000. Mr Clinton's tormentors may decide that the true humiliation would be not to bound him out of the White House, but to leave him stewing inside it.

The tapes: Fears and favours revealed

Gary Young in Washington

AT THE heart of the controversy engulfing the Clinton presidency lie 90 minutes of recordings of Monica Lewinsky's confidante, Linda Tripp. In her conversations with Linda Tripp, Lewinsky

refers to him as "the big he" or "the big creep", extracts of which have appeared on the website of Newsweek magazine. Lewinsky tells Tripp that she is considering informing Clinton that she has told others about the affair in the hope that it would convince him to settle the case with Paula Jones and keep her out of the media spotlight.

"Look," she says to Tripp on the phone, "maybe we should just tell the creep. Maybe we should just say, 'don't ever talk to me again, I fucked you over, now you have this information, do whatever you want with it.'"

Tripp says: "Well, if you want to do that, I think he should

know." Lewinsky replies: "He won't settle. He's in denial." She tells Tripp that if Tripp tells Jones' lawyers about Lewinsky's affair with Clinton then she too will deny it. "Look, I will deny it so he won't get screwed in the case but I'm not going to get screwed personally."

When Tripp asks her why, Lewinsky responds, "because it will be obvious... it will be obvious to him that I told you."

Later in the tape she says she cannot admit to Clinton that she has told others about their affair. "If I do that I'm just going to fucking kill myself."

Lewinsky claims that Clinton gave her a dress and hints that he also sent her an official photograph with an inscription on it. She then expresses concern that knowledge of the gifts will be discovered by Jones's lawyers and used in evidence against her.

Lewinsky says: "I was thinking about the fact that I sent a note to... creep to thank them all for when my family came for the radio address."

"The note I sent to him, Dear Schmuncky, thank you for being, as my little nephew said, it was great to meet the principal of the United States."

Lewinsky describes an 18-month sexual relationship during which she allegedly made love to the president in a small room off the Oval

office. But she says the relationship cooled after accusations that Clinton had harassed another White House aide, Kathleen Willey, came to light.

At the beginning of the tapes she speaks tearfully about the affair but by the end she sounds embittered as it becomes clear that she is about to become ensnared in the Paula Jones case.

Last summer she called the president to ask for advice. Clinton, Lewinsky says, told her not to worry because Jones's lawyers would never find her. When she received a subpoena on December 17, she says she called the president again and he told her he would send his longtime confidant, Vernon Jordan, to advise her on how to respond.

Lewinsky tells him her concerns about being caught lying under oath. Jordan tells her not to worry because perjury in civil cases is rarely prosecuted.

Lewinsky mentions Jordan at least twice by his first name. But nowhere does she confirm the crucial allegation that he persuaded her to lie under oath. She talks about acting "based on what Vernon said," although it is not clear what Jordan told her.

But in another statement she says: "I have lied my entire life." The remark relates to her claim that concealing the relationship was not difficult, but also raises doubts about the entire episode.

version rather than disputing that an affair had taken place.

Ms Flowers, unlike the president, has never wavered in her assertions. In New York before Christmas she was doing the interview rounds, selling her autobiography, *Passion and Betrayal*. It gives details of their affair and her abortion.

"Who was the father of your unborn child?" demanded the talk-show host Geraldo Rivera. "Bill Clinton was," Ms Flowers answered.

"And keep in mind he had only been married to Hillary for about 18 months," Mr Clinton had told her he could not have children. Shortly afterwards he told her Hillary

was pregnant with Chelsea. Ms Flowers said he had spoken to her about Hillary. "He said she was basically cold and that he was not satisfied with their sexual relationship. He would laugh occasionally and call her 'Hilla The Hum,'" she told Mr Rivera.

"I knew he was not going to leave her for me but it was like a drug. I was very, very much in love with him."

Now married to Phineus Sheldahl, a brother-in-law of one of Mr Clinton's friends, Webster Hubbell, who was jailed for financial impropriety, Ms Flowers says that when she first met Mr Clinton he seemed like a "great man."



Gennifer Flowers

Old regrets: 'Change of heart' over affair with singer

Joanna Coles in New York

ALTHOUGH he denied harassing Paula Jones over having a sexual relationship with Monica Lewinsky, President Clinton did reportedly admit one thing last Saturday in his

sworn statement to Ms Jones's lawyers. He did have an affair with Gennifer Flowers.

He had always denied a liaison with the beautiful blonde cabaret singer who appeared on the eve of his 1992 election and claimed they had been lovers for 12 years.

After Ms Flowers made her revelations, Mr Clinton appeared on 60 Minutes, the current affairs programme where, to the nation's astonishment, he launched the first of many successful damage limitation exercises.

Reaching for his wife's hand, he admitted he had caused "pain in our marriage". The "confession" had

been agreed beforehand and widely lagged. But at no time did Mr Clinton admit he had slept with Ms Flowers.

Last Saturday's sworn statement to the contrary, as reported by the Washington Post yesterday, opened yet another Pandora's Box while appearing, finally, to vindicate Ms Flowers.

The White House yesterday refused to comment on Mr Clinton's deposition for legal reasons but insisted that his story had not changed since 1992 when he said: "Her story is not true."

It has been speculated that Mr Clinton may have been quibbling with the terminological detail of Ms Flowers's

version rather than disputing that an affair had taken place.

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It's not cricket says Boycott



Fielding the questions... Geoffrey Boycott denies assaulting Margaret Moore (top left) and says his reluctance to marry her was at the heart of the row

MAIN PHOTOGRAPH SEAN SMITH

Sarah Hall

HE claimed he had no intention of behaving "like a circus animal", but yesterday Geoffrey Boycott provided ample entertainment as he faced the media to deny he was guilty of assaulting his former lover.

The former England and Yorkshire opening batsman had called a press conference after being convicted on Tuesday by a French court of brutally assaulting Margaret Moore, 45.

And, with customary dourness, he jumped through various hoops, before refusing to play ball.

The 57-year-old Yorkshire man, renowned for his blunt, no-nonsense manner, called the conference at the headquarters of the Sun newspaper, for which he writes a column, just hours after Mrs Moore appeared on GMTV denouncing his denials that he had hit her as "an absolute lie. He has beaten me up three times."

Mr Boycott, flanked by newspaper executives who said his column would continue until the outcome of an appeal, did little to court those he had summoned. Questions were dismissed as "silly", orders to "shut up" frequent, and a reporter was accused of taking "the woman's side immediately because you're a woman."

He launched into a lengthy rebuttal of Mrs Moore's claims. "It's untrue what she says... I never touched her. I have no history, in 57 years, of violence to anybody, man or woman — and I have had plenty of provocation when you think of Yorkshire cricket club."

He suggested that, had he struck the divorced mother-of-two 20 times in October, 1996, in an Antibes hotel, as she claimed, she would hardly have stayed with him a further two nights.

The suggestion that she remained because her eyes were swollen was waved aside. Moreover, he insisted, if Mrs Moore had really been harmed, she would not have sat up that night drinking champagne with himself and the American singer Billy Joel. Nor would she have phoned him "three, four, five times a day, pleading to come and see me and carry on the relationship."

Judge's ruling deals severe blow to Branson libel action

Kamal Ahmed
Media Correspondent

ACENTRAL part of Richard Branson's libel action against G-Tech and its chairman Guy Snowden collapsed yesterday, when the judge directed that one of the defendants had no case to answer.

Mr Justice Morland told the jury on the ninth day of Mr Branson's action that Robert Rendine, G-Tech's director of public relations, could not be held responsible for any of the material Mr Branson claims accuses him of being a liar.

Mr Branson is still taking action against Mr Snowden and G-Tech for claiming that allegations that Mr Snowden tried to bribe Mr Branson were untrue. Mr Branson claims Mr Snowden, now a director of lottery operator Camelot, offered him financial inducements over a lunch at Mr Branson's west London home.

It is alleged Mr Snowden wanted Mr Branson to drop out of the bidding to run the lottery, which a G-Tech consortium won. The company now has a 22 per cent stake in Camelot.

Mr Snowden is countering Mr Branson for making the claims in the first place. Later in the day, Mr Snowden told the jury he had a £30 million stake in G-Tech, which he helped set up in 1981. The hearing continues.

Lecturers must learn to teach

Move to raise standards likely to outrage senior university staff

Donald MacLeod
and Lee Elliott Major

UNIVERSITY lecturers will in future have to learn to teach before they are appointed to jobs. It has been agreed by management and higher education unions.

Plans to boost the status of teaching in the profession have been drawn up for the Government by the vice-chancellors, the funding councils, and lecturers' unions.

Clive Booth, chairman of the group that produced the report, said there was much good practice in universities but many shortcomings. "Universities are seen by many as amateurish in their approach to their teaching function."

The drive to raise standards of university teaching was given a boost recently by David Blunkett, the Education and Employment Secretary, when he complained his

son was not getting satisfactory attention because his tutors were more interested in research.

New lecturers will be affected immediately, but long-serving dons will have to demonstrate that they can teach, assess students' work and design degree courses — a policy likely to outrage some senior academics. Failure to gain the new qualifications will hit promotion chances for established staff.

At present, promotion and prestige among academics depend almost entirely on research publications, and departments are judged on how they perform in the research assessment exercise carried out by the funding councils.

Teaching is increasingly passed on to junior staff on



Sir Ron Dearing: his inquiry proposed the new institute

short-term contracts or post-graduate students who hope to get a foothold on the academic career ladder. Newly appointed lecturers

will have to enrol on special teacher training courses, accredited by a new national Institute for Teaching and Learning, as part of the process to be seen to universities for consultation.

The Institute was proposed by Sir Ron Dearing's inquiry into the universities which reported in the summer.

Universities would run their own teacher training programmes for lecturers, but these would be inspected by the Institute. Professor Booth's report proposes that lecturers would gain membership of the Institute as associates, progressing to be members and then fellows. But already there are signs of unease among staff.

The proposals could mean as much as 400 hours teaching practice for academics in the first few years of their appointments, on top of schedules of actual teaching, research and administration.

Police chief hits out at authority

Martin Wainwright

ACHIEF constable entangled in a bitter secrecy row over allegations of sexual harassment bowed yesterday to a disciplinary attack on members of his police authority.

David Burke, whose retirement as head of the North Yorkshire force was abruptly brought forward last week, accused the authority of "unlawful, unfair and unreasonable" behaviour and incompetence in handling an annual budget of £70 million in public funds.

The former chief constable, a conservative 59-year-old with no previous reputation for speaking out, effectively called on North Yorkshire voters to sack the all-party police authority.

His furious comments were the latest twist in a two-year row over clumsy and secretive handling of lurid sex allegations involving initiation rites claimed to have been carried out on young recruits at Harrogate police station.

Mr Burke told a press conference called by his lawyers in York yesterday: "The events have been extraordinary and bizarre. I believe that the citizens of North Yorkshire will feel that they are entitled to expect better. I believe they will consider the authority's conduct has been unlawful, unfair, unreasonable and unbecoming a public body."

His attack was triggered by an embarrassing muddle over his retirement, which had been delayed by the authority

to allow Mr Burke to answer disciplinary allegations that he failed to handle the sexual harassment scandal sufficiently toughly.

On legal advice, the authority suddenly reversed its own decision last week, dropped disciplinary proceedings and reverted to the original retirement date so abruptly that a colleague's retirement function for Mr Burke had to be

cancelled. "The real problem behind the whole affair has been secrecy, from beginning to end," said Phil Willis, Liberal Democrat MP for Harrogate, who has tried in vain to lift gagging orders imposed on staff involved in the affair.

The original allegations, including officers forced to crawl into dog kennels and wear bulldog clips on their nipples, were suppressed when a £600,000 compensation payment to a former woman detective was made conditional on the dropping of her industrial tribunal case and no further publicity.

"Things went wrong when the police failed to bring criminal charges against colleagues who had allegedly permitted or organised these initiation rites and sex harassment," said Mr Willis. "That would have brought everything out into the open and allowed the public to decide on an issue which has naturally shaken confidence and caused widespread concern."

"The other essential is independent scrutiny of the police when complaints are made, as recommended last week by the home affairs select committee. I have asked the Home Secretary for a Home Office inquiry into the whole North Yorkshire affair, and I hope the police authority will agree."



David Burke: invited voters to sack police authority

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The 'Bolton Seven'

Fight grows for gays in video case

They were convicted of gross indecency after taking part in private, voluntary sex sessions. Campaigners say the charges are the last gasp of a discredited law. **David Ward reports**

SEVEREN gay men are to be sentenced next month for taking part in private group sex sessions which they recorded on video for their own amusement. In a case described by gay rights campaigners as the last gasp of a discredited law, the 'Bolton Seven' — all from the former cotton town in Greater Manchester — were convicted two weeks ago of gross indecency. Judge Michael Lever has indicated that some of the group could be jailed for their part in activities which included anal masturbation, oral sex and buggery.

The seven, whose case is estimated to have cost £200,000, have attracted messages of support from two bishops and gay rights campaigners in the United States, Canada, Australia and South Africa, not to mention Glasgow and Brighton. An early day motion was tabled in the Commons this week. A defence campaign for the group will be launched in Manchester on Monday.

All seven men took part in the sex sessions willingly, campaigners point out. No one was hurt and no one would have been an eye for the participants had been heterosexual, they add.

But under the 1967 Sexual Offences Act, gay sex is lawful only if no more than two men take part or are present; at least three men were involved in each of the sex sessions caught on tape.

The Crown also says that a consenting male has to be 18 or over; one of the Bolton Seven was six months short of his 18th birthday when the camera was rolling.

But campaigners claim that the convictions for sex with a minor are at odds with the European Commission's ruling that it is unlawful for Britain to maintain different ages of consent for sex with men and women. They said that this year MPs are expected to lower the age of male consent to 16.

And they also point to one of the biggest ironies of the case: the Crown Prosecution Service chose to protect the minor member of the Bolton Seven by charging him with two counts of gross indecency and putting him in the dock with the men who were allegedly corrupting him.

Allan Horsfall, a veteran gay activist living in Bolton, has been surprised to find a landmark case on his own doorstep.

"We understood that the police would not proceed in cases such as this unless

there was an aggravating factor. The aggravating factor in this case appears to be that one of the group was six months under the age of consent. But since they knew this, it seems to me that the charges are the last gasp of a discredited law. A caution would have been enough. It's the last gaspings of a discredited law which is about to collapse under the weight of its own absurdity."

He suspects a CPS campaigner rather than a conspiracy, and that provincial, working-class, keep-themselves-to-themselves gays are a much easier target than metropolitan out-of-the-closet Gay Fridders.

Terry Connell, aged 55, who was convicted on one charge of gross indecency, said: "I have never been a gay activist. I don't agree with gays walking down the street linking arms or kissing in the street or getting married. I just want to get on with my life. I don't look at you as a heterosexual or myself as a homosexual. First and foremost we are human beings."

"I haven't actually come out. If you start coming out, it makes you feel different to everyone else. I certainly don't feel different."

The minor in the case — who cannot be named for legal reasons — met Mr Connell through a local football team. They started a relationship which later became sexual, and Mr Connell admits that he knew he was breaking the law.

"But you don't think about

The charges

The Bolton Seven — names and charges:

- Norman Williams, now 38: nine counts of buggery, one count of gross indecency, one count of indecency to commit gross indecency;
 - Jonathan Moore, 24: two counts of buggery;
 - David Godfrey, 24: one count of gross indecency;
 - Terry Connell, 55: one count of gross indecency;
 - Gary Abble, 31: one count of gross indecency;
 - Mark Love, 20: one count of gross indecency;
 - Unnamed minor: two counts of gross indecency.
- The men charged with buggery all admitted the offence; all seven denied gross indecency.
- Williams, Moore and Connell have been required to sign the sex offenders' register.

that at the time. It's the same as people smoking a joint. I don't mind if it's a fair law and I'm not looking for any preferential treatment. I just want an equal law. What difference does it make if a heterosexual couple are having sex in a bedroom and I'm standing in the door watching them? Why does it make it illegal if I stand and watch two men having sex? That's basically what this case is about."

Mr Connell acquired a

video camera which captured scenes featuring a threesome consisting of a 30-year-old man, the minor (who now has a pregnant girlfriend), and Norman Williams, who filmed sessions with other men.

A COPY of the tape, shown in full to the jury at Bolton crown court, was sent to the police, possibly by someone in a row with one of the defendants. Mr Connell was arrested as he came home from a night shift at a local bakery and was detained for 11 hours.

"The people have seen this film courtesy of the Crown Prosecution Service that would ever have seen it if they had left it alone," said Mr Horsfall.

Mr Connell insisted that he felt no shame as he stood in the street and heard his sex life discussed in public. "The prosecution barrister asked me if I thought it was grossly indecent for a 55-year-old man to have oral sex with a 17-year-old youth, I said it was not grossly indecent. I said for a 55-year-old woman to have oral sex with a 17-year-old boy. If that's legal, tell me what's the difference?"

He and two other defendants have had to sign the sex offenders' register because of their involvement with the minor, and recent being harassed as paedophiles.

The minor insists no one forced him to do anything he did not want to do. "It was heterosexual or lesbian, the case would not have gone to court. What's the difference between lesbians and gays? I was willing to do it. My girlfriend says I have done nothing wrong. And if you're doing nothing wrong, you don't sign the register."

Janet Craig, the group's solicitor, says the seven suffered personal torment during the trial and the homes of two have since been attacked. "This is a case full of absurdities from start to finish."



Terry Connell (left) convicted on one charge of gross indecency, and Allan Horsfall, a veteran gay activist in Bolton. The image of the minor, originally in this picture, has been removed for legal reasons. PHOTOGRAPH: DON MCFEE

'A caution would have been enough. It's the last thrashings of a discredited law which is about to collapse under the weight of its own absurdity'

Allan Horsfall, veteran activist

'I don't mind if it's a fair law and I'm not looking for any preferential treatment. I just want an equal law... Why does it make it illegal if I stand and watch two men having sex?'

Terry Connell convicted of gross indecency

Handicapped group wins legal fight over pub ban

Claire Dyer
Legal Correspondent

A PUB landlady who refused to serve 10 mentally handicapped people from a residential care home has been ordered to pay £8,000 in compensation.

Loughborough county court told Imelda Lydon, of the Plough in Loughborough, to pay £800 each to the residents, who brought their claim under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

Carmel Leyland, manager of Loughborough Residential Homes, had booked a table at the pub for a birthday party on Boxing Day 1996. Mrs Lydon refused to allow the residents to hold the party when she discovered they were mentally handicapped.

The act, which bans discrimination against disabled people in the supply of goods

and services or in employment, had come into force earlier that month.

Leicester Law Centre, with the free services of a barrister, Simon Robinson, took the case to court on behalf of the care home residents. One of them, Rachael Marston, said: "Our feelings were hurt. Anyone should be able to go to a pub."

Mrs Leyland said: "The residents really could not believe that they had to leave the pub because the landlady did not want them there. They have said all along that they were not bringing the case just to get compensation."

"They were very determined to bring the case to publicise the Disability Discrimination Act and highlight the rights of disabled people."

Disabled people are increasingly using the act to win compensation. Earlier this month Channel 5 agreed to

pay £7,000 to a deaf man, Christian Williams, after an industrial tribunal unanimously ruled that the channel had unlawfully discriminated against him.

The act requires employers to make adjustments to their normal working arrangements to remove disadvantages to disabled people. Mr Williams, aged 27, was accepted on a three-day course to learn how to retune TV sets to receive Channel 5 but was unable to complete the course because the company failed to make the necessary adjustments.

After Channel 5 was threatened with legal proceedings, he was allowed to retune part of the course with one-to-one support and passed, but was not given any work. The company claimed he had been "lost" in the computer system and by the time he was found the work was finished.

Mansell driving ban after pleading guilty to speeding

John Duncan
Sports Correspondent

NIGEL Mansell, previously well paid for clocking up to 200mph on the world's racing circuits, was yesterday banned from driving for six months, and fined £400, for doing 122mph on the A303 in Somerset.

Mansell, aged 44, was stopped by police near Sparkford as he drove from London to his country retreat in Devon on December 4 — just weeks after he collected a £288,000 Bentley Continental T — top speed 170mph — from the Earls Court motor show.

Tony Scofield, prosecuting, told the court at Yeovil that the speed recorded by officers averaged 92.32mph over a distance of 1.281 miles.

Samantha Cohen, defending, told the court that Mansell was not at present in the country, but was keen not to waste the court's time and was pleading guilty.

She added: "The car was a

new Bentley he had only picked up a few weeks previously, and it is particularly quiet. It is well insulated against noise and although Mr Mansell was not oblivious to his speed, it crept up over 70mph without him knowing."

In a 15-minute hearing, the court heard that Mansell accepted his offence, and the inevitable ban, as he already had nine points on his licence. The ban is an embarrassment for the former world champion, who is also a special constable with Devon and Cornwall police.

Roger Vincent, spokesman for the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents, said: "There are already enough people using Britain's roads as race tracks, what we don't want is the professionals joining them."

Cook tells Commons Labour is abiding by the same rules as the previous government for ministerial visits abroad

Major joins in row over ministers' foreign trips

Ex-PM says he barred partners from travel at public cost

Anne Perkins
Political Correspondent

JOHN Major stepped into the row over ministerial travel last night, indicating that he had never allowed members of his government to take partners on foreign trips at the taxpayers' expense.

His intervention came as Government sources said that ministers could take anyone they liked on to the public long as it was in the public interest. The public interest was defined by a minister as whether or not a programme was arranged for them.

The Opposition trade spokesman, John Redwood, described the Government's position as "ridiculous". He said:



John Major, Prime Minister

leader of the house, Gillian Shephard, asked: "How long do you have to be a partner to qualify for a free trip? And who decides?"

The Government insists that it has changed nothing. The Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, who was stopped from taking his partner, Gaynor Regan, abroad after the row broke last week, yesterday ducked questions at the master at a Foreign Office press conference.

But in a Commons answer he said: "The rules and practice on foreign travel by ministers have not changed and are the same as those followed under the previous administration."

That is not how Mr Major remembers it. He told a colleague yesterday he had never interpreted spouse to mean 'partner'.

The Ministerial Code, updated when Labour came to power, talks specifically about spouses accompanying ministers "occasionally" and when it is "clearly in the public interest."

This week the President of the Board of Trade, Margaret Beckett, was criticised for taking her husband, Leo, on two



Foreign Secretary Robin Cook, who was stopped from taking an official trip abroad with his partner, Gaynor Regan, left, when the row broke last week, and right, Leo and Margaret Beckett, President of the Board of Trade, who have taken two official trips together

trips at a total cost of £12,600 and Doug Henderson, a Foreign Office minister, came under fire for taking his partner, Geraldine Daly, to Luxembourg.

A Tory backbencher, David Wills, has now tabled a series of questions asking when the interpretation of the

code changed, and when the first permission for a partner to travel was given.

Last night a Government source explained: "It's a common-sense approach to the rules that are there. The overriding rule is to take your spouse or partner on a foreign

visit only if it is in the public interest."

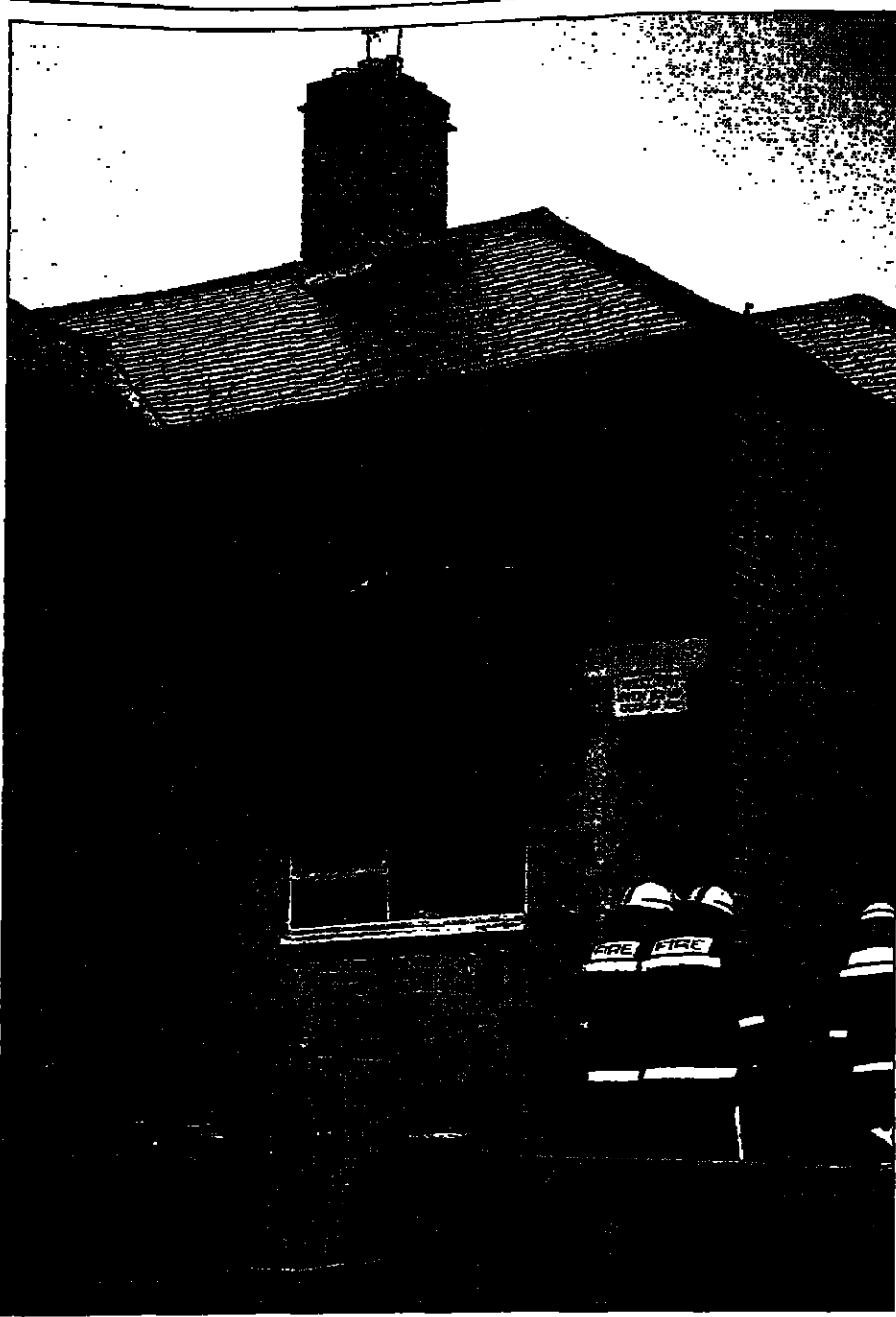
In a separate development, the Prime Minister has disclosed in a Commons written answer that the projected cost of the Number 10 special adviser pay bill for 1997-98 was £849,894. This included

special advisers in the strategic communications unit, who, like all members of the unit, were funded by all Whitehall departments.

The cost of between seven and eight special advisers in 1996-97 was £434,249. The shadow Culture mini-

ster Francis Maude said the figure was another in a "series of revelations which undermine the credibility of the institution of Parliament and the Government."

Analysis, page 11; Leader comment, page 12



The burned-out council house in Braunstone in Leicester yesterday PHOTOGRAPH: DARREN STAPLES

Family dies trapped in house fire

Rory Carroll

A YOUNG mother and her four children died yesterday when a fire turned their house into a furnace. The heat was so intense neighbours were unable to get past the garden gate.

Police arrested a man at the scene on suspicion of arson, and last night he was being held at a police station near Leicester.

Flames engulfed the ground floor of the house in Braunstone in Leicester within minutes, trapping Teresa Harcourt, aged 28, and Kirsty, nine, Malcolm, six, Kelly, five, and Kimberly, two, in their bedrooms.

Ms Harcourt is reported to have been estranged from the children's father, but one friend said she may have been pregnant.

Neighbours were awoken at 4.30am by flames and smoke pouring out of the downstairs windows of the semi-detached council house. Brian Lee, aged 55, said: "I could see the flames coming out the front door and going up the wall. I heard somebody shout 'They are still in there'."

Ms Harcourt's mother, Maureen, and her sister, Maria, who live nearby, attempted a rescue. Maria said: "As soon as we got to the garden gate we were beaten back. I was shouting 'Save those kids' and my mum was screaming. I just kept praying that they weren't in there, but

we were later told they had died and my mum was hysterical."

Fire crews wearing breathing apparatus thought they might have saved the two youngest children, but they were dead on arrival at the Leicester Royal Infirmary. Smoke inhalation was the likeliest cause of death.

The windows of the house were blown out by the heat. John Freeman, divisional officer of Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Services, said the temperature inside would have exceeded 300°C. "Some of the crews have taken it pretty badly. It is always very difficult when children are involved."

The 14 firefighters from four appliances were offered briefings to deal with trauma.

Scene-of-crime and forensic experts yesterday began sifting through the remains of the house. A Home Office pathologist, Clive Bouch, also attended.

Last night Ms Harcourt's mother, Maureen Parker, said the deaths had yet to sink in: "I am still expecting Teresa to call me and come running over."

Mrs Parker's brother-in-law, Norman Honsell, said the family was very close. "The children were on the go all the time."

"This is just a terrible waste of life. I am glad they are not suffering any more." Neighbours gathered outside the house yesterday and laid flowers with messages.



The mother and four children who died in the fire. Above, Teresa Harcourt and son Malcolm, six; below (from left), daughters Kelly, five, Kimberly, two, and Kirsty, nine



News in brief

Testing 'will cut HIV births'

PREGNANT women should be offered a routine HIV test to cut the number of babies born with the condition undiagnosed, researchers said yesterday. Modern drugs given to the mother can significantly reduce the chance of a child carrying the virus, specialists reveal in the British Medical Journal.

Only one in six women with the virus is identified during pregnancy — a rate that has not improved over the past 10 years. Other countries which have introduced a universal offer of tests have a better rate of reduction in paediatric Aids than the UK.

HIV prevalence among mothers in London rose six-fold between 1988 and 1996, from one in 3,100 to one in 520. In France and the Netherlands all women are offered the test by law.

In one study, Dr Wendy Simpson, of Edinburgh University, found the offer of testing was not seen as intrusive. Wide use of tests could cut the number of babies born infected in London from 40 a year to 13, experts believe. — Chris Millill

people with eating disorders," said a spokesman for the authority. It had received 78 complaints from people with anorexia or bulimia, from relatives and friends of sufferers, and from the Eating Disorder Association.

An Accurist spokesman said the company had also received complaints, and claimed that the advertisement was no longer running. "There was never any intention to cause distress," he said.

Models One, the agency used by Zoya, the model in question, said that she was naturally thin and "an exceptionally beautiful girl".

NHS tackles complaints

WRITTEN complaints about the NHS are running at a rate of almost 2,500 a week in England alone, according to the first full analysis published yesterday.

A total of 129,964 written complaints were made in 1996/97, according to the official log of the Government Statistical Service. Of these, 92,974 were complaints about hospital and community health services and 36,990 about GP and other family health services.

No direct comparison is possible with previous years, but just under 106,000 written complaints were made about hospital and community services under a former system in 1995/96.

Of last year's complaints about hospital and community services, two-thirds were resolved locally within four weeks and only 4 per cent were being pursued at the end of the year. — David Brindle

Prison officer rape charge

A PRISON officer has been charged with raping a woman inmate inside a jail. The attack is alleged to have taken place at Risley prison in Cheshire, which houses 150 inmates in the female wing.

The male officer is to appear before magistrates in Warrington next month charged with rape and indecent assault. The officer was immediately transferred from the female wing after the woman made a complaint that she had been sexually assaulted and a police investigation was started.

He later went on sick leave and was suspended when charges were brought against him. He has been granted bail by police until his appearance in court. It is understood that DNA tests were carried out before the charges were brought.

Comedy prize for Full Monty

A BRITISH film, The Full Monty, took the best comedy prize at the South Bank Show Awards in London yesterday. Actors Hugo Speer, and William Snape, aged 11, collected the award from actress Thora Eld.

Oscar-winning The English Patient won best film, beating Gary Oldman's Nil By Mouth. Cast members of BBC2's hit programme This Life were there to accept the best drama award.

Top pop prize went to The Verve for their album Urban Hymns, and theatre director Sir Peter Hall was presented with the outstanding achievement award.

Chris Smith, the Culture Secretary, and Gerry Robinson, arts council chairman, presented awards.

Thin girl ad under fire

AN ADVERT for Accurist watches featuring an ultra-thin model is being investigated by the Advertising Standards Authority.

The woman has a silver watch wrapped round her upper arm, with the slogan: "Put some weight on."

"We're investigating it on the grounds that it might be distressing and upsetting to

"I partied, blew my money, and had a broken marriage. I took solace in night life and all that went with it. I was going out on Friday, coming back on Tuesday." But Gary Mason is fighting back

Sport98 page 8

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سكان من الجبل

'Rip-off' by immigration advisers to be curbed

Alan Travis
Home Affairs Editor

THE Home Secretary, Jack Straw, yesterday promised to move against bogus immigration consultants who "ripped off" millions of pounds of legal aid and exploited the plight of their clients.

More than 250 companies or individuals gave the Home Office "cause for concern", said Mr Straw. They are known to include 38 firms of solicitors. Some "consultants" claimed to be Home Office officials, and one even called itself the "Immigration and Nationality Department".

The identities of most of those in the racket are well known to MPs and reputable immigration welfare agencies. Some demand fees of up to £5,000 for advice that is free from government-funded advice agencies such as the Refugee Legal Centre, the Immigration Advice Service, or an applicant's local MP.

The Home Secretary even cited one firm of London solicitors who travelled down to Dover when hundreds of Czech and Slovak Romanies arrived and "started dishing out legal aid green forms" and urged them to "manufacture" asylum claims.

With more than 150,000 people now trying to resolve their immigration, citizenship and asylum claims, there has been a sharp growth in advisers active in an area of law that is notoriously complicated.

"Many of the unfounded or abusive claims for immigration or asylum received by the Home Office are the result of misleading advice given by unregulated advisers," said Mr Straw. "For too long they have been able to prey on the

vulnerable causing genuine misery and clogging up the system."

But Mr Straw said that he was powerless to name those involved until legislation was passed to set up an official register of immigration consultants, requiring them to sign up to a tough code of practice. More than 3,000 firms are expected to register.

The promise of legislation was welcomed by most immigrant welfare organisations, but yesterday Mr Straw clashed with the Law Society after he accused it of failing to act promptly on Home Office complaints about the activities of certain solicitors. The Law Society said the names had never been forthcoming.

Mr Straw said he favoured lawyers as well as consultants facing registration in this area; under the scheme outlined yesterday, those who carry on unlicensed would face substantial fines or possibly imprisonment. The controls are unlikely to reach the statute book this year. Ministers are still discussing whether there should be fresh immigration legislation in the autumn Queen's Speech.

Alasdair Mackenzie, of Asylum Aid, welcomed the Government's plans and stressed that it was important the register covered lawyers: "Even the most deserving can have their cases rejected if they are not expertly represented," he said.

The Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants also praised the move: "We are pleased that the Government has realised that immigration and asylum advice is a growth area which causes misery to genuine immigrants and asylum seekers, who, in their desperation, end up going to cowboy operators," said its director, Claude Moraes.

'He posed as an international lawyer who knew his stuff on US law. He was right: he had been in prison in the States'

Alan Travis

THE fate of one applicant, a Jamaican rape victim, was left in the hands of an "immigration adviser" who — it turned out — had served more than 20 years in jails in the United States, and was to be jailed for rape here in Britain during the application.

Andrea, who has a learning disability, was brought to Britain with her eight-year-old daughter on a visitor's visa by her London relatives. Her carer in Jamaica had left her alone and she had been attacked several times, and there were no family left in Jamaica to look after her.

Her family took advice from an immigration consultant, John Trygve, in Shepherd's Bush in west London. "He presented himself as a solicitor in his stationery and at the office," said Andrea's aunt. "He posed as an international lawyer who knew all his stuff, especially American law. It turned out he was right on the last point. He had been in prison in the States."

"He asked for £500, which they gave him, and seemed a genuine person anxious to help."

Trygve, however, instead of simply submitting an application to the Home

Office for her to stay on compassionate grounds, lodged an application for political asylum. He asked for and was given a further £250. He then disappeared; the family learned later that it was because he had been jailed for rape.

Trygve's associates passed her case on to other consultants, who asked for another fee. But little was done, and Andrea's case was rejected by the Home Office and she was ordered to be deported to Jamaica.

When the family went back to the second firm, they could not even see the adviser.

"It was at this point we realised they were not solicitors — only days before the deportation, and £1,000 later."

After advice from Bernie Grant, Labour MP for Tottenham in north London, among others, the family found a reputable firm of solicitors who halted the deportation and persuaded the Home Office to reconsider. Andrea has now been allowed to stay.

"The 'advisers' have no feelings for human suffering whatsoever," said the aunt. "We were distraught and going all out to help Andrea."

"We were lucky. Most of the people involved are not simply trying to sell their stories, because they have been deported and are a lot poorer."

Short-cut roundabouts to ease traffic congestion

Keith Harper
Transport Editor

A MENU OF hamburger and hot cross bun junctions was yesterday unwrapped by the Highways Agency.

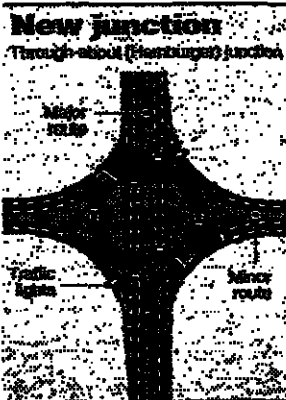
The new junctions are part of a package introduced by the roads minister, Lady Hayman, to improve traffic flow and help public transport.

The "double through about hot cross bun junction" is innovative because drivers will be encouraged to drive across roundabouts, protected by synchronised traffic lights.

The "through about hamburger junction" will provide a short, extra section of road inside a roundabout, with Give Way signs at either end to prevent the entire roundabout coming to a sudden, sticky halt.

That may sound like a recipe for accidents but the Highways Agency stressed last night that the junctions had been tested and would only be introduced if officials were satisfied.

The RAC gave them a cool



welcome. "Motorists should be warned well in advance of what they are approaching. Otherwise the schemes could produce chaos."

Among other ideas in Lady Hayman's "toolkit" were plans to enable drivers to switch more easily from one form of transport to another. In the event of a hold up on the M1 or the M6 motorway signs would flash up the time of the next train to Manchester or London.



The coffin of Catholic taxi driver Larry Brennan, 52, who was murdered in his cab in Belfast on Monday, being carried from his home in the city yesterday. At his funeral attended by hundreds — but not by his loyalist girlfriend, who is believed to have been threatened by loyalists — Patrick Walsh, Bishop of Down and Connor, called for a united voice to condemn all murder as morally wrong.

PHOTOGRAPH BY BRIAN LITTLE

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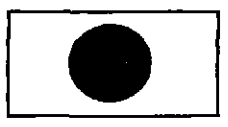
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Algerian violence

Press holed up in no man's land

Self-preservation may require a journalist to engage in occasional self-censorship, Ian Black reports from Algiers

NASSIM Kouba faced a journalistic dilemma this week. It was Tuesday evening when a call came through from Saïda province that seven members of one family, including four handicapped children, had had their throats cut and their bodies mutilated.

For the news editor of one of Algeria's leading newspapers, Liberté, the question on the day three European Union ministers were expressing mounting concern about violence was whether to print this terrible but routine story.

"We were quite sure that it was true but, with the EU mission in town, we felt it was hard to report yet another atrocity that seemed to show the state is incapable of protecting its citizens," he said.

Mr Kouba and his colleagues agonised and then ran the piece under the byline of A. Berben, the name of the paper's local stringer, anonymous because of fears for his life.

Liberté, with a circulation of 120,000, is one of a dozen French and Arabic dailies that have started a dangerous course since the army cancelled the 1991 elections and drove Islamists underground.

Its dingy offices are in a quiet residential part of town, but many papers are housed centrally in the Maison de la Presse, where there are armed guards at the gate.

More than 70 journalists have been killed, apparently by Islamist terrorists. Some suspect, but cannot prove, that elements of what everyone calls "Le Pouvoir" — the powers that be — may have been responsible too.

Zineddine Allian, one of

four Liberté employees killed, believed it would be the government that would get him. Police checkpoints near his home disappeared the day he was shot in 1995.

"There are shadows that we cannot penetrate," said Mr Kouba.

Violence is just one problem. Officials say they censor only items bearing directly on security. But the instinct for self-censorship — and perhaps self-preservation — that Liberté resisted in the case of the Saïda story is strong.

Compared to every Arab country but Lebanon, Algeria's press is far from tame. It is certainly less so than the country's state-run TV.

"They can control pictures, but not words," said the respected editor of Al-Watan, Omar Belhoucet.

It was Mr Belhoucet who dared publish an article's accusation that 90 per cent of the killings were carried out by the government.

"These papers are showing signs that they might become really independent, but for the moment they don't want to jeopardise their chances," said one diplomat. "Certainly, if a general was responsible for massacres that wouldn't get published."

That is why human rights groups have urged Algeria to end censorship, allow free access to local and foreign media, and break down what Amnesty International calls "the wall of silence and indifference".

Some of them have been neutralised. Selma Ghazal, winner of the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize for human rights, had her Nation newspaper closed on the pretext that it had not paid its debts

to government-owned presses. According to one school of thought, media attacks may not bother Le Pouvoir. "What is a threat is a bubbling up of uncompromising, populist Islamist indignation," a foreign observer argued. "The government can deal with dissenting elites."

Newspapers cope with the crisis partly through black humour. Last Sunday Liberté ran a cartoon showing the American ambassador visiting the scene of a massacre. "Welcome excellency," mouths a decapitated head as the envoy shakes hands with a severed arm. "I hope I don't have to give him a kiss," the envoy says.

Life may be less dangerous now for Algerian journalists as the savage moves on to measure the poor and unemployed.

Some journalists live in the relative safety of the Club de Pins outside Algiers, a well-guarded location for the government and social elite. But the fear is always there.

"Every time I leave home I'm not sure I will come back," says Mr Kouba.



A newspaper vendor in Algiers. In comparison to other Arab countries, Algeria's press is far from tame

Liberté ran a cartoon of the US ambassador at the scene of a massacre. 'Welcome excellency,' mouths a decapitated head as the envoy shakes hands with a severed arm. 'I hope I don't have to give him a kiss,' the envoy says.

Whiz-kid's hi-tech ticket

The premier of Andhra Pradesh has a vision, but do Indian voters share it? Suzanne Goldenberg reports from Hyderabad

Suzanne Goldenberg reports from Hyderabad

NA region renowned for its political showmen, he exerts a quiet charisma, sending World Bank officials and computer executives into raptures with slick presentations delivered with a few key strokes on his laptop.

Chandrababu Naidu, aged 46, the chief minister of southern Andhra Pradesh, is a self-proclaimed technocrat — a departure in a state ruled for many years by a film star adept at blurring the line between the Hindu gods he portrayed on screen and reality.

The Telugu Desam Party, founded by the late actor N. T. Rama Rao, promised Andhra voters a heaven on earth. He pledged himself to women by imposing prohibition, and to the poor by subsidising rice.

Mr Naidu, who overthrew his father-in-law in a power struggle in 1995, dismantled both programmes and raised the sales tax. He is asking people to forego immediate gratification and work hard to turn the state into an Asian tiger by 2020.

"People want performance. Before, all the government gave was welfare programmes. Slogans will remain temporary, but performance is lasting. That's what I believe," he said.

On the computer terminal behind him, an Economist magazine screen flashed Russian financial statistics. "For many years, we have to work hard. There is no substitute. And we have to plan. In America and Japan, what do you find? There is a culture of hard work. We have to put the new work culture here and a new psychology."

Mr Naidu is not becoming



Mr Naidu, left, and former prime minister H. D. Deve Gowda celebrate in December after forcing the new elections

a legend for his dedication; his weary sides say he works from 8am until 10pm. His vision of the future are borrowed from South Korean and Malaysian attempts at social engineering, and his vocabulary from a business administration textbook.

He is unfazed by the collapse of south-east Asian economies. "Innovation, vision, motivation, work culture will bring you everything. What I want to build is a knowledge society. In my parents' day one had to do physical work, now only the brain has to work."

In his quest for knowledge, Mr Naidu has put the state administration on-line. He plans to further entrench his control by introducing video-confer-

encing with officials in remote districts. He claims to spend 30 minutes a day on the Internet.

Indeed, so taken is Mr Naidu with modern management techniques that last year he enrolled his cabinet in courses at the Administrative Staff College of India, which trains senior civil servants and business executives.

Mr Naidu's approach has made him the darling of Hyderabad's urban elite, and won him praise from the World Bank, Microsoft's Bill Gates and the United States government, which has upgraded the state to the fourth most attractive Indian destination for foreign investment.

The US state department has announced plans to post a commercial consul in Hyderabad.

He is conscious of his image as a future prime ministerial contender should the United Front perform well in these elections, or in the future. "I can do wonders here. I see myself as an example as a

national average, and in some areas only 11 per cent of women can read and write.

The opposition Congress has accused Mr Naidu of profiteering by buying up land on the edges of Hyderabad.

But the real danger to Mr Naidu arises from the mass suicide of cotton farmers whose crops have been wiped out by pests and disease. The suicides have emerged as the main issue in next month's elections, challenging Mr Naidu's own claims of efficient administration, and casting him as an uncaring leader.

"His idea of managing a constituency is to put the entire population on a grid according to class, caste and needs, and then just study it," sniffed one critic.

Mr Naidu has won praise from both the World Bank and Microsoft's Bill Gates

relatively youthful Mr Naidu to a pivotal position in national politics as the convener of the United Front. This coalition of regional and left-wing parties formed the government in New Delhi in May 1996, and its fall last November precipitated the elections to be held next month.

chief minister for following modern methods."

But his critics say that Mr Naidu's fascination with the information age is but a modern variant of the late Rama Rao's gimmickry. Parts of the state are among the poorest in India. Literacy is a woeful 40 per cent, far below the

national average, and in some areas only 11 per cent of women can read and write.

The opposition Congress has accused Mr Naidu of profiteering by buying up land on the edges of Hyderabad.

But the real danger to Mr Naidu arises from the mass suicide of cotton farmers whose crops have been wiped out by pests and disease. The suicides have emerged as the main issue in next month's elections, challenging Mr Naidu's own claims of efficient administration, and casting him as an uncaring leader.

"His idea of managing a constituency is to put the entire population on a grid according to class, caste and needs, and then just study it," sniffed one critic.

Security service linked to killings

Richard Norton-Taylor

AS MORE bloodshed was reported from Algeria, the country's security services were accused yesterday of continuing in the massacres and of torture.

Captain "Joseph" Haroun, described as a former member of the Algerian secret service, told the Commons all-party parliamentary human rights group that his former colleagues were implicated in "dirty jobs, including the killing of journalists, officers and children".

"They have been taken at

'Journalists, officers and children have been taken at night to torture centres'

the middle of the night to torture centres at Ben A. Krou, Chateaufort, Cavignac, and Saligny," he said.

He also claimed that the militant GIA (Armed Islamic Group) had been infiltrated by the Algerian security forces.

This charge was also made by Rashid Messoudi, an Algerian-born journalist, who said that one of the massacres had taken place close to military barracks.

"More than 300 people were butchered last September near Beni Messoud, near Algiers and only a few hundred yards away

from eight military installations," he said.

Mohammed Sekkoum, a former Algerian diplomat, speaking for the first time since he defected in 1995, said London should put stronger pressure on the Algerian government to accept independent United Nations and European Union investigators, and impose sanctions if they refused.

In Algeria, a dozen "terrorists" cut the arms and legs off four children, then slashed their throats. Their parents watched helplessly before being killed in their turn. La Tribune newspaper reported yesterday.

It said one imam's family of eight was killed overnight in Rahal, an isolated hamlet in the south-western province of Saïda.

Liberté newspaper said seven "terrorists" were killed in an army ambush on Wednesday at Baghla, in Boumerdes region, east of Algiers. It said three civilians had been killed by an armed group at Khemik El Khachma in the same region.

Another seven or eight rebels were trapped by security forces on the heights of Sidi Medjber in an operation which was still under way, said La Martin.

The prime minister, Ahmed Ouyahia, told a special meeting of the national assembly that more than 1,000 people had been killed since the start of the year. He said the government was determined to win the war against terrorism.

His figure contrasts with estimates by diplomats and human rights groups, who have put the death toll at between 85,000 and 90,000.

Mr Naidu is not becoming

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TheGuardian INTERACTIVE

Pope lifts bans on 'male fantasy' priest

Jonathan Stiles

AFTER prolonged criticism from senior Catholics around the world, the Pope has withdrawn his excommunication of Father Tissa Balasuriya, a Sri Lanka priest who described the "traditional view of the Virgin Mary as a docile and obedient mother" as a "delayed" fantasy of male chauvinists.

Fr Tissa is the first priest excommunicated by the Vatican for almost 50 years. Many of his supporters argued that he was vilified because he represented Catholics in a continent where they are a tiny minority.

At a ceremony in Co-

lombo last week the priest, aged 73, made a "statement of reconciliation" before the papal nuncio which was published yesterday. It allowed the excommunication, imposed in January last year, to be lifted immediately. "I didn't accept excommunication. It was a compromise," Fr Tissa told the Guardian.

He was not allowed a hearing in Rome, and was asked by the Vatican's doctrinal watchdog, the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, to sign a retraction including a statement denying that women had the right to become priests.

The Vatican's high-handed behaviour outraged numerous bishops, priests, theologians and lay Catholics. The demand for reconciliation was compared with Stalinism.

Although they did not all agree with the views expressed in his book Mary and Human Liberation, his supporters said his excommunication was a denial of natural justice after a lifetime in the church.

Fr Tissa refused to recant but was persuaded to soften his line after Father Marcello Zago, the superior-general of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, the monastic order to which he belongs, travelled from Rome for six days of "dialogue and reflection".

In his statement of reconciliation Fr Tissa said he regretted that "serious ambiguities and doctrinal errors were perceived in my writings and provoked neg-

ative reactions from other parties". But he said he had hoped for a more open dialogue and an "objective scrutiny" of his book.

Fr Tissa, who worked for many years in the shanties of Colombo, argued in his book that Catholics who work in countries with large Hindu or Buddhist communities must have an open approach to other religions. He particularly criticised the view that Christian baptism was essential for salvation.

When the Vatican opened its archives on the Inquisition yesterday, it emerged that the Bible was once banned because the Church feared letting the faithful read sacred texts without its ecclesiastical guidance.

Robyn McDowell in Phnom Penh

MARY ROBINSON, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and former president of Ireland, yesterday visited a former prison where up to 20,000 people were tortured to death in Cambodia.

Mrs Robinson was "very moved" by her visit to Tuol Sleng, a former school turned into a torture centre by the Khmer Rouge, who killed up to 2 million Cambodians between 1975 and 1979.

She arrived yesterday on an official visit to look into all aspects of human rights in Cambodia, ranging from Khmer Rouge atrocities to repression in the aftermath of last July's bloody coup.

Torture centre schools UN chief in Cambodian abuses

Robyn McDowell in Phnom Penh

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"I feel an inner sense of justice when I see these atrocities that we must fight against cruelty and inhumanity," she said after touring what is now a genocide museum at Tuol Sleng.

Her four-day visit comes amid renewed attacks by the first prime minister Hun Sen on UN human rights investigators in Phnom Penh.

Mrs Robinson met the foreign minister, Ung Eut, and said she had been told that the UN Centre for Human Rights would not be forced to close in March when its mandate expires, despite frequent government criticism.

The centre's investigators were threatened with expulsion for reporting the torture and murder of at least 48 supporters of Prince Norodom Ranariddh after the coup.

French communist archives

Secret history revealed



Moscow's meddling in party decisions can now be laid bare, writes **Paul Webster** in Paris

MANY of France's best-kept political secrets are to be revealed after a decision by the French Communist Party to throw open its archives covering its post-war domestic and international policies.

Historians and researchers will be invited to an open day at the party's multi-storey glass-fronted headquarters in the Place Colonel Fabien this weekend. They will be guided through an inventory that includes sound recordings of central committee meetings and previously closed personal documents of leaders like Waldeck Rochet, secretary-general between 1964 and 1971.

The new openness, which includes an Internet link, is another sign of a revolution in the party since Robert Hus succeeded Georges Marchais as leader in 1994 and overturned its Stalinist image. Because the documents cover events up to 1988, when the movement's influence was at its height, they should show the extent of Moscow's interference in party decisions.

The open day coincides with the publication by the magazine *L'Express* of an internal document from 1981 showing that Marchais, who died last year, worked on Moscow's behalf against the late Socialist leader François Mitterrand's election as president.

The document, obtained from an anonymous source, was verified by Communist officials.

Yesterday party archivists showed some of the millions of documents containing details of party rows during the

Hungarian and Czechoslovak invasions, the Algerian war and the student riots of May 1968. Several boxes contain details of relations with Iron Curtain parties.

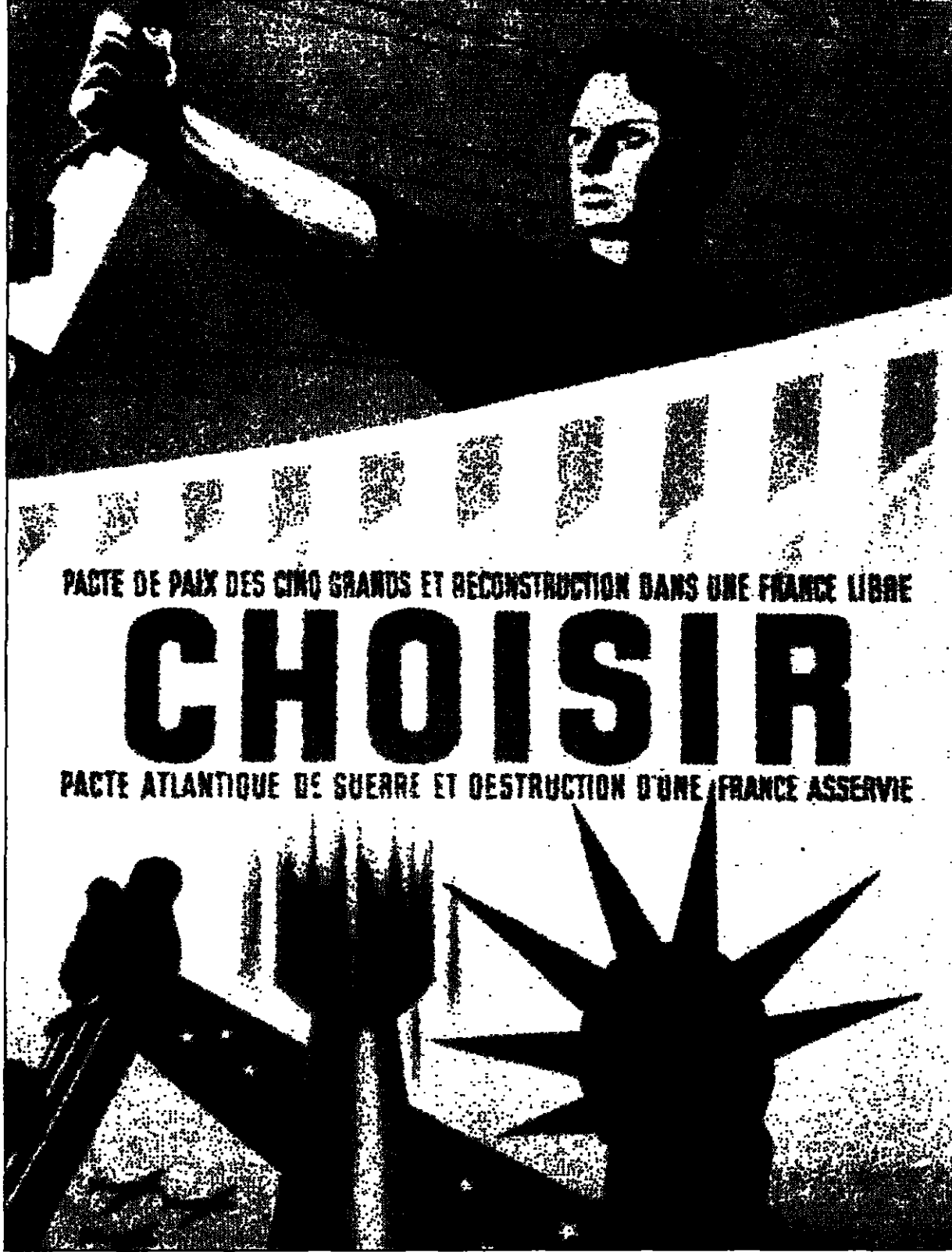
Most of this material has still to be sorted, but historians will be able to search for documents explaining the relentless rise to power of Marchais. He succeeded Rochet after an operation in the Soviet Union in 1969 left him an invalid for life.

Jean-Paul Magnon, head of an archives commission which has spent five years preparing the end to secrecy, said there was no legal right of public access to the files. But the party, which forms part of the current Socialist-led coalition, would allow access under the 30-year rule applied to national records.

Specialists would be allowed to consult later documents. "Party management records include accounts of all political bureau and secretariat meetings from 1944 to 1988, and will enable historians to understand the movement's political strategy, internal operations, and the economic and social history of France," he added.

Mathilde Angeloni, the archivist who prepared the inventory for website access, said that the central committee sound recordings went back to the early 1980s. "The public will be able to hear some passages at the weekend, when they will also be advised on how to obtain access to documents on the Internet. We are the first political party to put our history on the Web," she said.

Research has uncovered thousands of propaganda posters, of which about 180



Two of the 180 propaganda posters from the French Communist Party's past, above, which will be exhibited together

are being exhibited together. Although the party's pre-war history is kept at the Marxist library in Paris, the newly-opened files will remain at the headquarters. The complete history of the post-war years is unlikely to be written until the party

obtains the personal records of its foremost leader, Maurice Thorez, who died in 1964. His widow has yet to release them.

The Web access to the headquarters library is: <http://www.pcf.fr/archives/>

EU rewards Bosnians who back peace

Martin Walker in Brussels

THE European Union has changed its spending rules to enable it to disburse more than £330 million directly to Bosnian towns and communities which show they support the Dayton peace agreement.

The change, prompted by the EU's frustration at the central Bosnian government's ethnic squabbling and delays, is intended to speed up refugee resettlement. But the EU also hopes to increase its aid to parts of Republika Srpska which are not under the sway of "the radical nationalist opposition of Pale", the EU external relations commissioner Hans van den Broek said.

But despite the new Republika Srpska government's promise to back the Dayton accords, Mr van den Broek resisted pleas for the EU to pay the salaries of its civil servants.

Carlos Westendorp, the High Representative charged with implementing Dayton, urged Brussels earlier this week "to find the means of providing this new government with direct assistance, as it struggles with a non-existent budget and a state of total corruption".

The reform of EU aid strategy follows claims by some MEPs that endemic corruption was putting up to a third of the aid "into the wrong hands". The EU originally committed \$700 million to Bosnia, about half of which has been spent.

Edith Müller, a German Green party MEP who investigated EU aid for the parliament's budgetary control committee, said that although the EU was by far the largest donor to the international aid effort, she was told in Bosnia: "The Americans are good, the World Bank is good, but of the EU we see nothing."

She recommended the parliament to refuse to endorse the commission's use of the aid funds, a serious step which could lead to a formal inquiry.

The commission is scrambling to improve its performance, sending staff from Brussels to beef up its aid mission in Sarajevo, streamlining its system of tenders for local contracts, and organising today a workshop for 450 NGOs to see how they can improve the EU record on the ground.

In its defence, the commission said that difficulties arose because it had to channel funds through the central Bosnian authorities. For example, its attempts to repair telecommunications towers near Pale, an integral part of the Bosnian phone system which was destroyed by Nato bombing, were blocked until it agreed to upgrade the telephone systems in the Bosnian Croat and Muslim regions too.

"In order to get approval on refugee return projects, we had to get agreement from all three representatives of the central authority, and they were not always ready to

War crimes suspect held

ABOSNIAN Serb war-crimes suspect was arrested by Nato troops yesterday. Goran Jelenc was detained in the Bosnian town of Bijeljina, Karen Coleman writes in Sarajevo.

American soldiers took part in his arrest, along with Dutch, British, German and French forces, US military sources said.

Mr Jelenc, aged 29, later arrived at a United Nations detention centre outside The Hague. Eyewitnesses said he was driven to Scheveningen jail in a car with a police motorcycle escort.

He was indicted by the International War Crimes Tribunal in 1995 for committing genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and breaches of the Geneva Convention while commanding a notorious detention camp near the northern Bosnian town of Brcko in 1992.

agree," Mr van den Broek said. "They look at this on an ethnic level, so that each gets a piece of the pie. That's the problem we can sidestep, by ensuring now that we can give aid directly to every community and entity that complies with the Dayton accords."

By sidestepping the central authority, however, the EU is implicitly accepting that the core of the Dayton agreement — the need to maintain Bosnia-Herzegovina as a united state bringing together the three communities — is faltering.

Yeltsin has bone site to pick as cities bid for tsar remains

Tom Whitehouse in Moscow on the battle to bag the prestigious Romanov shrine

THE trays containing the remains of Russia's last tsarist family were too wide for the door of Yekaterinburg's forensic morgue. So the removal men tipped them on their sides, sending the bones clattering around inside.

An armed guard began his vigil outside the locked door. Despite the rough treatment, these are coveted bones. But in their travels from a murderous grave to laboratories at home and abroad, one of Tsar Nicholas II's vertebrae has gone missing.

"I didn't steal it," said the morgue director, Nikolai Nevolin. "We are trying to locate it and an investigation has been launched."

Time seems to be running out. Next week, 80 years after their execution, President Yeltsin is due to decide on a resting place for Russia's last ruling Romanovs.

But with three of Russia's most powerful regional bosses campaigning to have the remains buried in their respective cities, seven years of squabbling over the bones is not done.

Moscow's pugnacious mayor, Yuri Luzhkov, and his St Petersburg rival, Vladimir Yakovlev, are making eloquent claims to host what could be a huge royal funeral.

But they may have met their match in the stubborn Eduard Rossel, governor of Yekaterinburg, who holds the trump card — the bones themselves.

"The president should take my advice on this matter and let us keep them here. This is where they were first buried and this is where they should remain," said Mr Rossel, who first authorised the ex-

humation of the bones from a bog in 1918.

They were buried there by the Bolshevik forces who executed the tsar's family in the basement of a Yekaterinburg villa in 1918.

"This was a brutal burial. But don't forget that bones only account for 10 per cent of a body. That means 90 per cent is still in our soil. So the rest must also remain here. It would be wrong to split them up."

All tsars since Peter the Great were buried in St Petersburg, the former imperial capital. Mr Yakovlev argues.

Mr Rossel has a ready response. "Ah, but Tsar Nicholas abdicated. When he died he was no longer the tsar."

Unfortunately for the Yekaterinburg governor, the same argument is used by Mr Luzhkov, an influential national figure. Ordinary members of the Romanov family were buried in Moscow, he points out, and after abdicating that was what Nicholas became.

Mr Luzhkov hopes the bones will sanctify the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour on the Moscow river, whose lavish reconstruction he made possible.

On the site of Yekaterinburg's Ipatiev House, where Nicholas and his family were executed by a

Bolshevik firing squad in 1918. Orthodox Christians have been arriving in a steady trickle to pray in front of an open-air cross.

"This is the site of Russia's Golgotha," said a young trainee priest, his breath condensing in the freezing air. "The tsar and his family must be entombed here in a new church where Russians can seek redemption for the sins of this century."

The choice of burial site weighs particularly heavily on Boris Yeltsin because it was he, as Communist Party chief in Yekaterinburg (then Sverdlovsk), who carried out the politburo's order to flatten Ipatiev House to prevent it becoming a shrine.

St Petersburg is seen as the favourite choice. But neither Mr Luzhkov nor Mr Rossel is going to give up easily, conscious of the prestige and tourist earnings a shrine to the last tsar will confer.

Vadim Lobukhin, deputy head of Russia's unofficial Assembly of the Nobility, scoffed at Mr Rossel's ambitions. "Rossel promised a cathedral a couple of years ago but he can't even clear the snow."

"If you were murdered in the hall would you want to be buried there? If you asked Nicholas himself, he would have preferred St Petersburg."

In fact, the reactionary Nicholas disliked St Petersburg. Given a choice he would probably have opted for Moscow.

But Mr Rossel refuses to yield.

"I will organise a conference of Romanov relatives here and they will decide what should be done. I know that most of them want the tsar and his family buried in Yekaterinburg and I cannot imagine the president going against their wishes."

Commission proposals put right to strike at risk

Stephen Bates in Brussels

SWEEPING proposals which would interfere with workers' right to strike have been put forward by the European Commission in the wake of the French lorry drivers' dispute.

The commission in Brussels, acting on complaints by British haulage firms and companies throughout the Continent, wants powers to fine governments of member states if they do not remove strikers' blockades in 10 days.

The rule would prevent Irish farmers blockading Welsh beef imports or French lorry drivers stopping all lorry shipments, but, as drafted, it could also be used by employers to claim damages for disruption to the free movement of trade.

Lord Simon, the British European Trade Minister, welcomed the move at the European Parliament on Wednesday. He told the MEPs: "The proposal is indeed very important, given the need to deal with serious obstacles to trade. The objective is, of course, not to limit basic rights in the industrial sector."

The British Government, which currently holds the EU presidency, hopes to reach an agreement in May. The rule would require approval by all 15 member governments. Some commissioners, including Neil Kinnock, oppose any move to curtail the freedom to take industrial action.

Any prospect of European bureaucrats surmounting the barricades and levying daily fines on governments is likely to cause uproar in countries such as France and Belgium.

Yesterday the Labour MEP Glyn Ford said: "I welcome the initiative to preserve free movement, and clearly some of the things that have been going on need to be legislated against, but it must not be used to undermine fundamental rights."

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The tarnished president
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Coming to the aide of the party

Are they unpaid diplomatic helpmates, or wives and girlfriends ripping off the Exchequer? Mistresses are fine in France, gay partners in Holland, so maybe Britain is lagging behind modern mores. By **Christopher Elliott** and **Stephen Bates**

AMID the furore over whether Gwyneth Paltrow is the "mistress" of Robin Cook, the "established partner" (lobby briefing), other more important questions should concern us.

What is Ms Paltrow's role when she travels with the Foreign Secretary? Why should the spouse or partner of any government minister accompany him, or her, at the taxpayer's expense? Has Britain been slower than other countries to catch up with changing social mores? And how do other public and private sectors deal with the question of partners accompanying directors or leaders on trips to conferences?

Geoffrey Howe, now Lord Howe of Aberavon, who visited 30 countries in his six years as Foreign Secretary in the 1980s believes that his wife, Elspeth, a formidable public figure in her own right, was a crucial helpmate. "When Edward Shevardnadze became Foreign Secretary and came for the first time to a meeting of the Nato/Warsaw pact in Helsinki, we all very much wanted to greet him as the new boy on the block, so to speak. The part played by George Schultz's wife and mine helped enormously to give him and his wife a sense of belonging. The wives are there as part of the whole exercise."

The rules, which haven't changed since Labour took office, are described in Paragraph 83 of the Questions of Procedure for Ministers (QPs).

official status by the Foreign Office with rights of access, residence and travel usually reserved for spouses.

Media reports showed that Ms Paltrow had been on an official one day trip with him to Dublin on November 3 last year. There was a suggestion in some reports that Cook might not have asked for the appropriate clearance from the PM. It appeared also that Tony Blair had intervened to prevent her accompanying Cook on a 10-day international tour.

The issue grew when it was revealed, following probing by the Tory MP David Wills, that Lord Irving, the Lord Chancellor, had been on official trip to the Caribbean, costing £13,000, with his wife. And on Wednesday events took a further bad turn for the Government when it was revealed that Doug Henderson, the Minister for Europe, whose marriage broke up 18 months ago, took his partner, Ms Geraldine Daly, on official business to Luxembourg in October, at a cost to public funds of £57,549.

This figure was revealed in a parliamentary question that showed Ms Paltrow's trip to Dublin did not come from the public purse, thus removing the need for official approval. Further, sources close to Blair made it clear this week that while the rules hadn't changed under this Government, the interpretation had. Ms Paltrow will be allowed to join the Foreign Secretary on future overseas trips.

The issue refuses to die down not least because of the gleam of an opposition glad to at least appear to be heading for the high ground of moral and fiscal probity. Elsewhere in Europe the predicament of the British provides much amusement.

In France government ministers have a history of travelling with their mistresses. The term wife is rarely used on such trips. "Compagne" is preferred to avoid casting anyone with a minister as either wife or mistress. The French press have an unwritten code which deems such things un-newsworthy.

President Mitterrand was accompanied by an unknown young girl on a number of foreign visits; only recently was she identified as his illegitimate daughter. The official view from the French Embassy is that there are no rules covering such events.

Italy is another country where conduct on these trips is not covered by a set of rules. Generally it is left to the discretion of an individual minister. The joke in the Italian Foreign Office is that no min-



ister in his or her right mind would take a spouse along.

The Dutch have no official guidelines but have adopted a liberal attitude. Wives, husbands and lovers may go with cabinet ministers on foreign visits. This includes gay or lesbian partners, and has ignited a heated debate. The consensus is that officials representing the government or royalty should respect the wishes and culture of the host nation, for instance the Arab states.

The institutions of the European Union theoretically discourage wives from going on trips when their husbands are on official business. But the Luxembourg-based Court of Auditors, the EU's financial watchdog which is supposed to monitor waste, was embarrassed recently when the auditors and their wives stayed at a £180-a-night hotel in Vienna. The 15-strong court, made up mainly of accountants and former civil servants from

each of the member states, go off for an agreeable annual "week of reflection" at a four star hotel to ponder the EU's financial rectitude and, as they see it, say it's natural to take their wives with them.

However, Thames Television's Big Story programme caught up with their wives out shopping and ferried in official buses and chauffeured limousines. The auditors promised to repay the money.

Elsewhere in Europe, MEPs' wives are not paid for on trips, if they accompany their husbands, but there are always ways around the rules. You can employ your wife as your assistant or secretary and the cost can generally be absorbed into the cost of the trip.

British politicians could avoid the mess they have got themselves into by following the example of the Church of England, which has managed to avoid trouble by making the Archbishop of Canterbury's

wife an official part of the delegation every time Dr George Carey goes abroad. Today the couple return from a week-long trip to Ethiopia, during which Mrs Carey has visited schools and hospitals at the specific invitation of her hosts.

A Lambeth Palace spokeswoman explains that it is traditional for an archbishop and his wife to be regarded as having a joint ministry and for invitations to include them both. All "receiving" churches pay the internal costs of the visit, and sometimes the Carey's air fares as well.

However, the wives of bishops are probably unusual in their commitment to their husband's work. And the bigger the event, the bigger the muddle, is sometimes the case. When 2000 VIPs gather for the World Economic Forum to focus on managing global volatility at Davos in Switzerland next week 40 per cent of them will be bringing their partners. The role of the

significant other — there are no rules as to marital relationship or sexual orientation — reflects a very modern confusion. On the one hand, the majority of sessions are open to them and they can take part in the discussions. But if they get bored with pontificating on the financial crisis in the Far East, there is a special programme of treats, including an Audi A80 driving course, skiing and a Swiss culinary workshop.

Sources: (1) Questions of procedure for ministers. Cabinet Office, 1997; (2) Hansard, 21 January 1998; (3) embassies and Guardian foreign correspondents. Graphics sources: Official programmes of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, 1997; and the Davos World Forum, 1998. Illustration: Geoff Grenfield. Research: Matt Keating. Chris Elliott is a Guardian reporter; Stephen Bates is our European correspondent.

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Presidential affairs

Crass, but talk of impeachment is premature

HERE WE go again, with another tale of bedroom Bill and that loose presidential zipper. This time, even as the Whitewater affair swirls around him and as Ms Paula Jones was bringing her own separate charges of sexual harassment, he is alleged to have dallied regularly in his private study off the Oval Office with a 23-year-old intern, Ms Monica Lewinsky. A fine, if not an entirely private place. The room is too small for a sofa, stuffed with golf clubs, and any lubricious activity would have to take place under the glowering eye of Mr Clinton's collection of Winston Churchill portraits. The issue is whether Ms Lewinsky was offered jobs to keep quiet, and whether this amounts to obstruction of justice and conspiracy to commit perjury, sufficient to imperil the Presidency.

Before rushing to the yellowed files from 1974 about Richard Nixon and impeachment, it is important to bear some politics in mind. After all, the Congressmen and Senators will, and any impeachment process must be decided by the House of Representatives, who then bring the case before the Senate, where a two-thirds majority is required. In 1973-74, Richard Nixon was an unpopular President, with an even more unpopular vice-President in Spiro Agnew, himself forced from office after pleading "no contest" to charges of taking bribes. The unpopular Vietnam war was still staggering on to its humiliating end, and the US economy was reeling under the OPEC oil price rise and the start of hyperinflation.

Today, the US is enjoying its most sustained period of peace and prosperity since the 1920s. The President is popular, despite the fact that most voters suspect that his sexual morality is as loose as polls suggest their own to be. And the Republican majority in the Congress must decide whether it is worth impeaching Clinton, if that sim-

ply risks losing the next election by entrenching vice-President Al Gore as a White House incumbent.

Then there is the legal question. If special prosecutor Kenneth Starr did indeed send another White House aide, Linda Tripp, to wear a secret microphone while quizzing Ms Lewinsky, that raises the problem of entrapment. Ms Tripp had been appointed by the previous Republican administration, for whom Mr Starr had served as solicitor-general, which adds a dash of partisan politics to this stew. Ms Lewinsky was recommended to her new job in New York by Vernon Jordan, one of the most expensive lawyers in Washington. Tall, black and handsome, Mr Jordan is a presidential crony. But he is not a federal employee. Even if the allegations are true, he may embody a fire-break which could protect his president from direct legal responsibility.

Finally, there is the matter of proportion. American voters have twice elected Bill Clinton to the White House, knowing him to be no choirboy. Marital fidelity is not part of the Constitution's job description. And while naturally lapping up the scandal, American voters (like the British over Mr Robin Cook's embarrassments) show signs of becoming less puritan and more — shall we say — European in distinguishing between private and public life. Above all, impeachment is deadly serious matter, best reserved for deadly serious offences. Nixon was caught with tape-recorded evidence proving him to be covering up a political crime, trying to squash with bribes evidence tying White House employees to the squalid attempt to bug Democratic voters in election year. That "droit de seigneur" White House tradition of serial infidelity, as established by John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson, may be as gross as it is foolish. But it is not yet the stuff of impeachment.

When tolerance has its limits

We are still very confused about intimate relations

THE NEWS has seldom been so dominated by sex and its consequences. Never has the personal become so public and — although those slogan-bearing feminists never envisaged it thus — so political. A 60-year-old mother, a 12-year-old father and a family of 10 have accompanied the really important issues of the day: President Clinton's alleged liaisons and the Foreign Office's broad-minded view on the status of girlfriends. These stories reflect the confusion endemic in our culture about intimate relationships after 30 years of revolutionary change. What is the nature of commitment? How should it be publicly acknowledged? And what is the appropriate context in which to bear and nurture children?

A freak show is being staged to provoke moral panic: 60-year-old mothers and 12-year-old fathers are one-offs which fascinate the prurient. They resonate because they feed a fear of feckless parenting; they play to our guilty uncertainty about society's responsibility to ensure children are born into a stable family environment. This show is infused with a popular nostalgia seeing the solution in a return to a bygone era of the nuclear family. Absurd, dangerous, wishful thinking. The levers of moral authority — the church, stigma and concepts of respectability — which underpinned the nuclear family have collapsed.

There are two reasons to be wary of those who promote the panic: firstly, because their ambitions for welfare

policy may victimise the losers in this social revolution. Secondly, their wistful nostalgia helps perpetuate expectations which are going unmet: 82 per cent of teenagers expect to marry, but this is being outstripped by rapid change — the number of 18-49-year-old women who are cohabiting has doubled to 25 per cent in the last fifteen years.

Robin Cook and Doug Henderson and their girlfriends are also being used for this panic agenda, but they are not freakish. Indeed they accurately reflect the national trend: nearly 60 per cent of marrying couples have already cohabited. But while we have ripped up the old rule books, we have put nothing in their place. Just what rights do cohabiting partners have? Do you give the same status to a girlfriend of two weeks to a wife of 20 years? What part does public acknowledgement have to play in personal relations?

We are in uncharted territory. The Judeo-Christian conventions which have ordered family life for most of the last 2,000 years concealed pain and suffering — particularly for women. What we've gained is a precious tolerance, compassion, and individual freedom. But no one can delude themselves any longer about the pain and suffering that the current confusion brings. Tolerance has its limits. Everyone is groping towards their own understanding of them, and of how to behave in their most intimate relationships; hence our fascination in other people's personal lives — and the freak show.

Swallow the employment powder

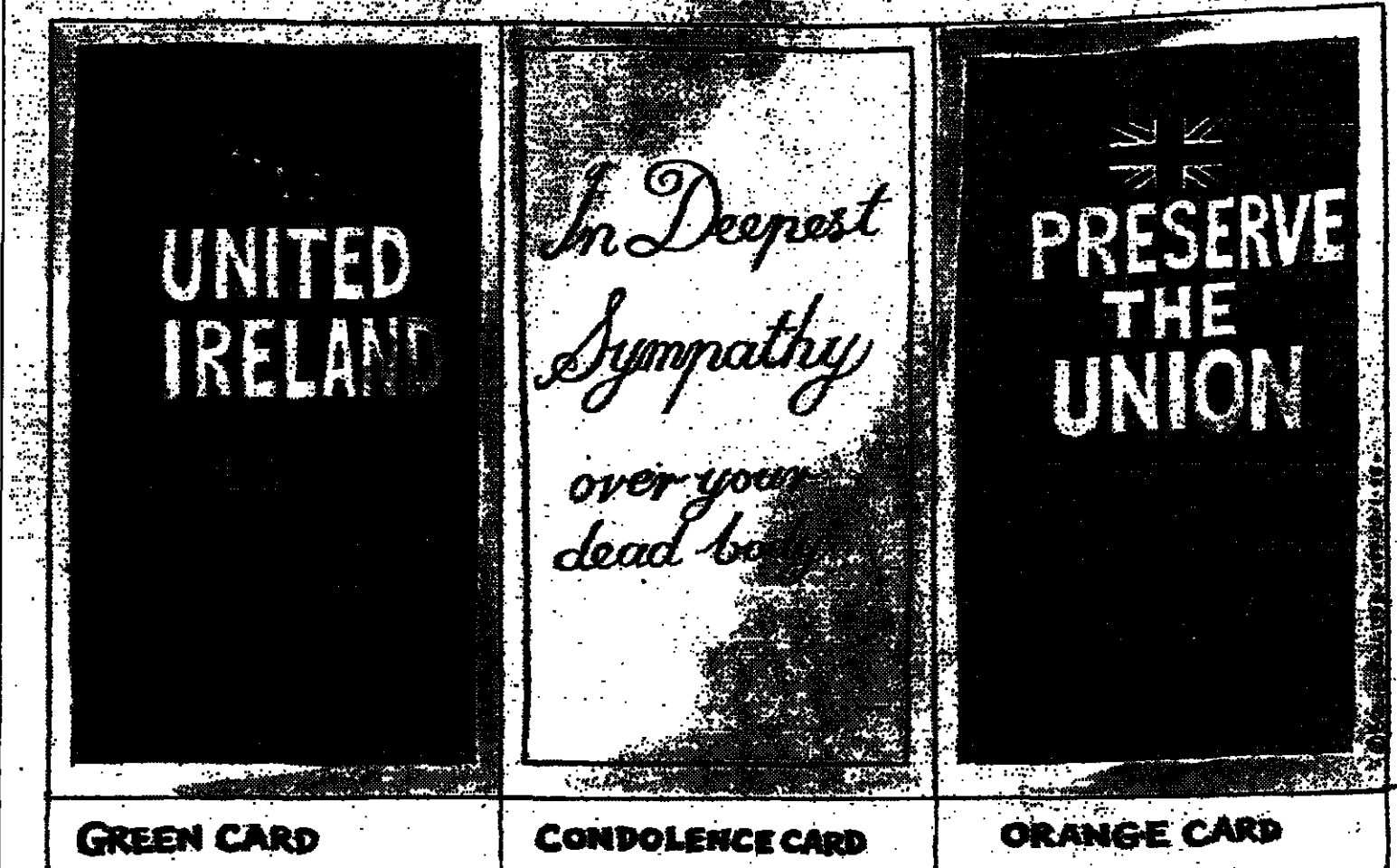
But it's better to be ill at home than to force yourself to work

WHAT sort of person goes to work with the flu? The person after your job, that's who, according to a controversial television advertisement for a flu treatment. It concludes with the advice: "Stop snivelling and get back to work". This is not — though you could be forgiven for thinking so — a public information film about the Government's welfare-to-work scheme. It is a "tongue-in-cheek" advert by Reckitt & Coleman to promote one of the company's flagship products, Lemisp. The campaign has already triggered an investigation by the Advertising Standards Authority and complaints from John Monks, General Secretary of the TUC who claims they are in bad taste and play on people's real fears. He says: "One third of all workers say they are afraid of taking time off work when they are ill and the advertisers have played on those fears".

This is true, but it also poses a puzzle

for economists. If the campaign is successful, will it lead to a reduction in unemployment compared to what would otherwise have happened? Or, by pressuring sick people to return to work prematurely, will it spread the bug more widely causing far more people to be off work (thereby boosting Lemisp sales further) than would have been the case if the patient had stayed at home?

There is a more serious point behind all this. Such adverts can only encourage a culture where being ill is perceived to be wrong and that staying at home when ill positively wimpish. Reckitt & Coleman can dismiss the incident as tongue-in-cheek, but what they really want is Lemisp in cheek. If advertising is as effective as they clearly think it is then a lot of people will be going to work who patently shouldn't be. There must be easier ways to restore the Protestant work ethic.



Letters to the Editor

Open Door to an in-house debate

WE read Ian Mayes' Open Door column (January 17) with great interest as it reflected our own feelings with regard to the flavour of the Guardian since the election. We read your paper in the hope that you will give an unbiased picture, in particular on the political front.

We are long-standing Labour supporters who were unhappy when the unions acted as they did in the 1970s. We wanted the Labour Party to move closer to the Liberal Party thinking, and that has now happened. The result was the landslide victory.

One of the ways in which we obtained the trust of the nation was by making a very clear commitment to hold government spending and thereby the tax burden to the existing levels. This has limited the scope for dramatic changes to be made in social welfare. But it was the agreed price for election.

The Guardian continually emphasises the fears of the disabled without mentioning that there is at present no reduction in their benefits. We accept Tony Blair's statement that there will be no loss of benefit for those in real need, and this needs to be said alongside the reported fears to give a balanced picture. Mr & Mrs E Barrett, 62 Burford Road, Whitney, Oxon OX 85 DJ.

IAN Mayes is being just a trifle disingenuous when he implies that readers are deserting you because your political writers are pursuing Labour just as they pursued the Conservatives. Can you really not tell the difference between the new administration and that seedy bunch of time-serving political chancers who have been laying waste to the country for the previous couple of decades?

We are not complaining about legitimate political criticism. What we are annoyed at is the gleeful spite and acid green bile which is beginning to seep through the entire journal. The rot started to set in on October 17, 1996, when Alan Garner, the much loved children's author and Carnegie Medal winner was supplanted in your Birthday Honours list by Peter Stringfellow, the not so table dancing impresario.

As for your "modest rise in circulation" you could get that by buying the life stories of a couple of pop stars.

140 Bishops Mansions, London SW6 6DX.

On libels

SO, is it official now? Can we now describe Rupert Allason as a convincing little shit? British justice wonderful. S Neville, The Curator's Flat, Warley Magistrates Court, Oldbury B66 4JN.

SURELY no one would have considered the articles in the Evening Standard to be the work of Alan Clark MP? They were written with style, knowledge and a sense of humour. R A Seymour, 10 Threshers, Crediton, Devon EX17 3NL.

IN HIS book, *The Fast Lane*, Geoffrey Boycott claims that Viv Richards and Joe Frazier, in their respective sports, regarded it "as a matter of pride to walk into the arena". How disappointing it must be for him that Margaret Moore is not made of the same sort of stuff. Jack Critchlow, 73 Sherwell Hill, Torquay TQ2 6LX.

Mental illness, from the inside

MY son has suffered from schizophrenia for the past 13 years. During this time he has been cared for either in hospital, in residential care or at home. Jonathan Freedland's commentary (Out of the bin and glad to be mad, January 21) gives a succinct and accurate view of the mental health service that I know.

Care of the mentally ill has always been extremely difficult to handle in a civilised manner. Recent dramatic advances in drug therapy now present an opportunity to provide a compassionate and effective service by rebalancing care and treatment provided by the psychiatric hospitals and that provided by the community resources.

In Peabrookshire, our psychiatric hospital is being prepared for closure. All the interested parties are agreed on a common shared vision for the implementation of this plan. The facts are these: the annual number of homicides by community care patients who have received treatment within the 12 months preceding the homicide is in the region of 60, or 15 per cent of the total. So much for Freedland's "statistical flim". Michael Howlett, Director, The Zito Trust, PO Box 265, London WC2H 9JD.

will of necessity be misused and care in the community will be inadequate. Philip Cunningham, Wollscroft, Peabrookshire SA92 1Z.

THE old-style anti-psychiatry view of mental illness held by people like Jonathan Freedland is not only hopelessly out-of-date but does a great disservice to the severely mentally ill who have been forced to live in the worst parts of our inner cities, without any support from health or personal social services, and who are at risk of posing a real threat to themselves or others.

And it is disingenuous of Freedland to support his views with a highly selective watered-down version of the facts. He is right to say there are 1,000 suicides each year by community care patients, but disregards the official source of this data in his own remarks about "homicides". The facts are these: the annual number of homicides by community care patients who have received treatment within the 12 months preceding the homicide is in the region of 60, or 15 per cent of the total. So much for Freedland's "statistical flim". Michael Howlett, Director, The Zito Trust, PO Box 265, London WC2H 9JD.

AS THE daughter of a manic depressive, I would like to add that sufferers are not the only users of our desecrated mental health services. Mental illness has a knock-on effect, and can threaten to destroy the strongest family unit. It is not as cut and dried as "Glad to be mad" versus "Lock 'em up and throw away the key".

Throughout my 30 years of coping with the situation I have heartily agreed with both sentiments. The trouble with care in the community as it stands is that caring is left to us with very little help other than "make him take these. See you next month". My father, understandably does not take kindly to enforced medication, especially at the height of a manic episode, but he does become angry, difficult and threatening.

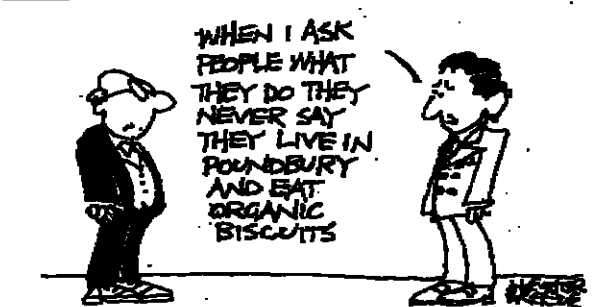
I love my father deeply and have found moments of great beauty and creativity in his illness but sometimes love is not enough and I simply don't have the skills to cope with him. I once resorted to a 999 call from a call box after I had jumped over a hedge to escape from him. The police, however, pressed by us, had no communication with the mental hospital. He gets treated as a criminal. I hope that Frank Dobson will recognise this missing

link, and with more co-operation we could avoid jail cells and court cases and provide somewhere that is, as Freedland put it, "asylum — in the genuine sense of the word". Temporary professional care that is easy to access would allow us all to take a deep breath, re-charge our batteries and get ready for the next round. Name and address supplied.

THOSE of us who have a psychiatric label know what the failures of the system are — because we have experienced them at first hand. But actually, since the mid-1980s, users of mental health services across the UK have organised, protested, campaigned, and struggled to be heard.

So why does the media persist in wheeling out the vested interests of the "more beds" SANE/Zito lobby who do the most to scare an under-educated and prejudiced public into fearing the worst about "the mentally ill".

Unless we can start a process of community education, everyone who finds themselves receiving psychiatric care will remain a reluctant member of a stigmatised and oppressed minority. Karen Campbell, Kingston, Surrey KT2.



Visions of Prince Charles

THERE are several slurs and half-truths in Jonathan Glancey's piece on the Prince's architectural dream (Adrift in a modern age, January 21).

Firstly, it is a convenient myth that the Prince timed the announcement of his resignation in 1991 as patron of the Museum of Scotland to coincide with the announcement of a modernist winner of the competition for a new building. He has in fact tendered his resignation some time before, in response to what he regarded as a failure properly to consult local people. It was the Museum which timed the announcement to create maximum embarrassment for him.

Secondly, my comments, quoted by Glancey, on the "rich and uplifting" structure proposed for the River Thames, had nothing whatsoever to do with the Fitzroy Robinson feasibility study, rejected by the Millennium Commission. I was in fact referring to a sketch proposal by the architect Christopher

Alexander — who was brought in at the suggestion of Charles' wife, which would have been constructed if Millennium funds had been forthcoming.

Dr Brian Hanson, Director of the Prince of Wales's projects office, 41 Westwood Road, London SW16 5RU.

JONATHAN Glancey correctly reports that Prince Charles did great damage to the talented Ahrends, Burton and Koralek practice when he published their National Gallery plan as a "carbuncle". But when he says ABK "haven't been heard of since" he underestimates their resilience. Among their outstanding projects are the British Embassy in Moscow and St Mary's Hospital in the Isle of Wight.

Indeed, they may well be in better shape today than their misguided assailant. Anne Page, 32 Lauderdale Tower, London EC2Y 8BY.

Catfights contrived by the media

WE CAN understand why Dr Rosalind Gill might think she has heard quite enough about Natasha Walter and the new feminism (Letters, January 21). But we hope she and other exasperated readers are sophisticated enough to know a false debate when they see one. You'd think from the press this book has got that it exists first and foremost to promote the sale of Wonderbras, and that it pits their viciously and ungraciously against everything "old feminism" stood for. As it happens, it goes to great lengths to say that most women do have traditionally feminist aspirations, and that seventies-style

activism is alive and well and deserves our support. Were these ideas not quite sexy enough to qualify as news? As "old feminists" who were there when it all began in the seventies, and when it did not happen in the eighties and nineties, we might think Natasha Walter naive for assuming all she has to do to get people to change is to ask them nicely. But after the catfight the papers organised, to her honour this week, it's clear that what she was most naive about was the media. Linda Grant, Maureen Freely, Department of English, University of Warwick.

My skinhead friends aren't Nazis

I AM a 16-year-old girl from Halberstadt (near Magdeburg) in east Germany, and am spending a year at school in England.

I was upset by your articles on neo-Nazis (Neo-Nazis rule the east; Skinhead bands croon message of hate, January 21) because they create a new (east) German stereotype, which is not accurate. It is wrong to say that "east Germany is a no-go area for foreign people", and that "foreigners can no longer move freely in eastern Germany". I live there and I can tell you that it is definitely not as bad as you described.

I do not deny that neo-fascism and neo-Nazism are problems in Germany. I have some experience of them and I know only too well that Nazi violence is the worst thing that could happen to anybody.

But the problem is not the young Nazis, but the old people who experienced the Hitler time and the second world war. They repeat all the old nonsense about the Jews and foreign people. Even my grandparents do and I feel ashamed.

My generation is likely to adopt these ideas, because there is hardly anybody else to tell them anything different. It is easy to blame the young people and not the people who have the authority and the power to do something about the Nazi problem.

I, for example, live in the state of Saxony-Anhalt. We have an unemployment rate of about 20 per cent. Boredom and hopelessness force us to find somebody to blame for all the trouble. I do not want to justify the Nazis and the right wing. On the contrary, I condemn everything they do. I blame the German government for not caring about us, and not doing anything for us.

The other thing which I do not like is the prejudiced view that skinheads are Nazi. Half of my friends are skinheads and they are not racist or nationalist in any way. Marie-Annebel Hanke, Riverside, Studley, Warwickshire.

We do not publish letters where only an e-mail address is supplied; please include a full postal address.

A Country Diary

NORTHUMBERLAND: Newcomers who have taken up residence in cottages and converted farm buildings in this village during the last 10 years have been a mixed blessing. For nearly 200 years, the locals have pushed prams, walked their dogs and supported elderly relatives and neighbours walking down a lounen (farm lane) which goes past a cottage at the west end of this village. The cottage has been dolled up and six months ago the incumbent stuck up a private notice forbidding us to walk the lounen. As you can imagine, the village rose up in arms. Ancient maps were produced showing the footpath clearly marked (as well as others, alas, ploughed up) local farmers were approached, sheep bleated and hens squawked in dismay. Battle lines were drawn up. Then the opposition collapsed, the notice was removed. Now we

are all back walking our lounen. During the years when we were consistently blocked in by snow in midwinter, I remember cheerful, whiskered, muffled gnomes emerging from their cottages and digging my elderly parents out, gritting the driveway, carrying coals, helping others unable to help themselves. Community spirit revived. A bonus has been the young couples who have moved to live here and sent their children to a small village school. A new classroom is being built and the children put on a play at Christmas in our village hall. Young and old turned out to support them. Our garden fronts the village street and I like to see the young mothers, the toddlers and the bugles which trail past our house when school comes out and elder siblings are being collected. They bode well for the future.

VERONICA HEATH

سبحان من لا يدرى

Diary

Matthew Norman

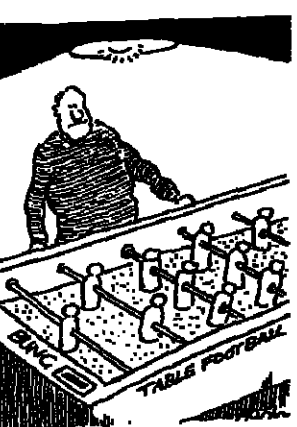
I AM increasingly baffled by Mr Tony Blair's approach to Prime Minister's Questions: as Matthew Parris noted in yesterday's Times, his answers now seem almost related to the questions. On Wednesday, for example, when William Hague asked what is meant by "affluence test", Mr Tony said it was important to reform the welfare state. Some might say such blatant evasion is an insult to the democratic process (PMQs are the only regular chance for Mr Blair's beloved people — via their MPs — to hold him to account), so we rang Betty Boothroyd's office to ask what powers she has to force ministers to answer properly. "None. She can't do that," said a spokesman. There is nothing she can do? "No." So if Mr Tony chooses to answer a question about inflation by attacking falsified cotton returns from Uzbekistan under Brezhnev, by reciting the Eneid, or by reciting the Eneid, Black Sheep, he can. Perhaps the time has come to realise one of Alastair Campbell's less salacious fantasies, by transferring all parliamentary activity directly to GMTV, and the capable hands of Mr Speaker Holmes.

THE news that his lover will be able to accompany Robin Cook abroad gives Foreign Office spin doctors a dilemma. Cook's next trip is to the Bahamas for a "Caribbean Forum" on February 19 and 20, and although this is fine, what worries the FO is the day after, on Valentine's Day, Cook visits the glamorous island of Montserrat... a vastly generous gift, should Gayle Regan be with him, to our censorious newspapers. Cook hasn't decided yet. It's none of our business, of course, but the Diary hopes for a moment to let the argot of Diplomats say bollocks to the press.

IN America, the cult status of a 1970s sitcom continues to grow. For next Thursday's episode of his BBC series, Lewis and Clark, the reporter visited what he describes as "the fortress-like compound" of Aryan Nations, a group of Nazi survivalists in rural Idaho. Surrounded by swastikas, he was invited to lunch by Rev Jerry Grudik, "a Reverend of Nazism", when the Rev declared: "I love England. You know what I really love about it? Are you being served?" But that's the classic irony of Lewis and Clark: the reporter for Nazi survivalists clerics in rural Idaho compounds... it's so very easy to lose touch with reality.

MEANWHILE, BBC2 devotes Tuesday nights to outstanding comedy. After Seinfeld and Larry Sanders this week came an unexpected bonus... a third great comic creation, in the form of my old friend Peter Bottomley. Peter Bottomley, who has been on the midnight hour to discuss MPs' outside interests. In truth he seemed a little hyper, constantly interrupting the journalist Paul Hollingsworth. "You say I was anti-gay?" Bottomley tells his colleague Simon Bowers. "I was not anti-gay. Most MPs across the spectrum thought I was really quite relaxed." But you're sure you're feeling OK? "Can I tell you something?" asks Bottomley. "You know, I am a very active member of parliament. I do a lot. And I look forward to the day when someone at the Guardian rings to actually ask me about things I do in parliament." That day will come, Bottomley. On that you have my word.

AFTER two days as the title's overlord, Kelvin McKenzie makes his mark on the Mirror. What concerns him is the court martial of Brian Bellingham, a navy officer charged with various counts of sexual misconduct known in the tabloids by the sobriquet Captain Underpants. To pass how he has fared each day in court went for him, Kelvin has invented a device called the Pantometer. "Yesterday was a bad one," says the caption astride a "fronts" and his pants are down. "Blatant. And good to see the old monster wasting no time in his stated quest to take the Mirror up market."



Fat is always a feminist issue



Decca Aitkenhead

A S Titanic crashed its way further into box office records this week, picking up a Golden Globe en route, Kate Winslet should have been enjoying the ride. Sure enough, the young star made the front pages, but the story in most of the papers was an unexpected one. Kate Winslet, great actress, whatever it went. But Christ! Have you seen how fat she's got!

The Telegraph introduced the actress as "Miss Winslet, who has piled on the pounds". The Sun printed a diet plan to help her correct this calamity, and suggested a slimming club. Kate Winslet has gained maybe all of a stone. Evidently, modest weight gain is the

most important thing to ever happen to anyone — which seems puzzling, so on Wednesday evening I went along to Weight Watchers.

Not one of the members at the local primary school meeting is very fat, I find. In fact, hardly anyone is overweight at all. The students in front of me are slim, and seem sensible enough, until their pretty friend gets off the scales, when they explode into members of a Gladiators TV audience. "Two and a half pounds! That's BRILLIANT! Well DONE!" As they are celebrating, two others file past, story faced — defeated by gaining the equivalent of a small packet of butter. A sign, "What you eat in private you wear in public", reproaches them as they leave.

After the weigh-in, our Leader congratulates us for being there. She plugs some Weight Watchers products, and teaches us how to operate the Weight Watchers calorie-and-fat calculator — a baffling and time-consuming contraption she recommends we carry with us at all times. If we go out to dinner, we must whip it out between courses.

Keeping score is allegedly easy, but plainly isn't, and if we want to pull it off we will have little time to think about anything else all week. The thought occurs that the diet will certainly solve the menial "fat" anxiety about looking "fat" on social occasions. It will turn them into such anal bores, their friends will soon stop inviting them out. Our Leader insists the system's a breeze — you can "eat what you like". No you can't, I think. If we ate what we liked, we wouldn't be in a diet.

OUR LEADER tells her story. That picture of the mildly chubby woman on the notice board, we discover, was her! Incredible! And we can all do it. One woman keeps counting each week, battling to lose the last two pounds, never mind that she's lost 23 already, she's still fighting! Our Leader is lost in admiration. She knows what it's like. There'll be a lot of "soul searching", but we'll "live for the scales", and getting up on them will be "heaven". There are 6,000 Weight Watchers meetings each week

in Britain, and thousands more at other clubs. The vast majority of members are women; indeed, almost every single woman diets at some point in her life, and a sizeable chunk are dieting all the time. Any woman significantly overweight, yet they are tyrannising otherwise interesting lives with the exhausting fantasy of weighing four pounds less. While the media's New Feminists are rejoicing in the "right" to look lovely, church halls and primary schools all over the country are full of women whose principal sense of self is located in a contest they will never believe they have won.

If they are going to hear nothing helpful from New Feminists, it is doubtful how much they will hear from old ones either. In Fat Is A Feminist Issue, Susie Orbach presented overeating as a necessarily psycho-sexual disorder, and, as such, worth getting into a state about. In Fat And Proud, published next month, fat rights activist Charlotte Cooper challenges the idea that women can't happily be fat. But she suggests fat is instead caused by some genetic condition, which is a curious thing for an activist to say, given the implication that if one's genes are fine, and you just like to eat a lot, you are indeed disgusting.

Then there is the Vanessa Felix position that being fat is great because men fancy her. If as this were how we should judge the acceptability of bodies, Jo Brand says being fat doesn't matter, but then builds entire shows out of the single fact that she is fat, which rather suggests that she

thinks it does. These "positive role models" are no less obsessed by weight than that poor soul at Weight Watchers trying to lose the last two pounds.

FOR those who are disgustingly and debilitatingly overweight, fat is a serious problem. To suggest otherwise is spirited but unconvincing, least of all to the obese, who know perfectly well that it is. But most people are not actually obese, and have better things to think about than their bathroom scales. Yet both sides of the diet debate have fetishised weight, telling people it's the most interesting and important thing about them — when of course, weight is actually very boring.

Charlotte Cooper writes of being fat-positive, when what she should surely be arguing for is fat-indifferent. Weight Watchers don't say fat people are morally repugnant, obviously, but present slimming as a morally virtuous pursuit. New Feminists are sad about cosmetic girls, then applaud the new men's magazines for putting pressure on their readers to lose weight, as if everything would be fine if we could all be discontented. What none of these demands is the simple solution — that we stop worrying about it.

As the Weight Watchers meetings close, a woman is trying to join, but doesn't weigh enough to be eligible. She is distraught. As I leave, she is still pleading. Our Leader's resolve is weakening. She understands how very important these things are.

Sylvia Plath and me — made for each other



Bel Littlejohn

IT takes a poet to understand a poet, which is why I dedicated my mid-period book of almost unbearably heartfelt poems, *Rug Me While I Weep* (For I Weep For The World) (Faber and Faber, 1973, 27pp) to the memory of Sylvia Plath.

No, I did not "know" Sylvia in any pedantic, literal sense of the word: strictly speaking, I never "met" her, either before or after her demise. But in a far more interesting sense, I knew — and know — the real Sylvia probably better than any other human being alive on this strange and beautiful planet, this "frozen blood-orange trapped in a juice-extractor", as I described it in one of my most searing and memorable images. And I certainly know Sylvia more intimately — of this much we can be sure — than Ted Hughes ever did.

I first grew close to Sylvia in the autumn of 1963, a few short months after she had passed away. Over lunch with a senior editor, it was suggested that his company would be delighted to publish my own first volume of poetry, *Words Unwritten*, in a limited edition of between 50 and 100 copies, depending on market demand, so long as I would deliver a definitive biography of Sylvia Plath for their spring catalogue.

He had heard rumour on the grapevine, he said, not only that Plath had once been a friend of Lee Harvey Oswald, but that her estranged husband, Ted Hughes, had regularly had Fidel Castro down to stay in his Devon farmhouse. Perhaps I could work it in.

IT is widely acknowledged in academic and literary circles where I live that the resulting biography, *Bel and Sylvia: A Literary Friendship* (1994), entered into the mind of Sylvia Plath as no other writer has ever done, before or since, not even Sylvia, who was inevitably divorced from a true understanding of herself by her proximity to the subject. It urged the reader to rediscover the poetry of Plath, not by the superficial act of going to a library or bookshop and reading all those words of hers, but by the infinitely more empathetic method of making friends with Sylvia, putting her words to one side and immersing oneself in the minutiae of her childhood, her marriage, her tempestuous affairs.

Though I never managed to

trace the direct link between Plath and Oswald or Hughes and Castro, I felt that the deeper symbolic truth was more important, so I included it. There is also a particularly vivid passage in *Bel and Sylvia* in which the biographer lays the blame for a number of other things — Sylvia's death, the male colonisation of her memory, the female crisis of confidence, the Suez Crisis, the decline of Britain as a post-war industrial power — fairly and squarely at the door of Ted Hughes.

My Plath biography soon became seminal at home and abroad, gaining me my Visiting Professorship at the University of Amarillo. During that time I enhanced my status as a leading contemporary poet and biographer with the publication of a second, profoundly moving, long overdue study of Plath's daily life, *Up The Garden Path*: The Essential Sylvia.

NEEDLESS to say, my researches met with a wall of silence from Hughes. To my simplest request — for Sylvia's exact waist-measurement, for the name and address of the store from which she purchased her original Bell Jar, for information on her preferred private photographs of the two of them on holiday together, for a brief signed confession from Hughes acknowledging his company would be delighted to publish my own first volume of poetry, *Words Unwritten*, in a limited edition of between 50 and 100 copies, depending on market demand, so long as I would deliver a definitive biography of Sylvia Plath for their spring catalogue.

And so we arrive at the publication of Ted Hughes's new book of poems about his relationship with Sylvia Plath, written, I suspect, in some kind of vain attempt to prove he somehow knows more about the two of them than all the serious writers and academics who have been labouring at the coalface of Plath Studies for the past 30 or more years.

Judging from the factual inaccuracy of the poems I have read so far, they are of no value at all to future biographers. In one poem, for instance, Hughes contends that Sylvia wore a "blue flannel suit" for her first class college; can he really be so unaware of recent Plath scholarship not to realise that research has shown it was in fact far more likely to have been a blue brushed-cotton suit? Some poem that turned out to be!

With this untimely publication, Ted Hughes has done the cause of poetry studies no good at all. Myself, I would like to return to Sylvia's verse, which must stand by itself in its purity, free from title-tattle. And that's an argument I'll be forcefully putting forth in my forthcoming book, *Sylvia And Ted: Behind Closed Doors*. Buy it.

Jonathan Freedland says Bill Clinton's dream is dying

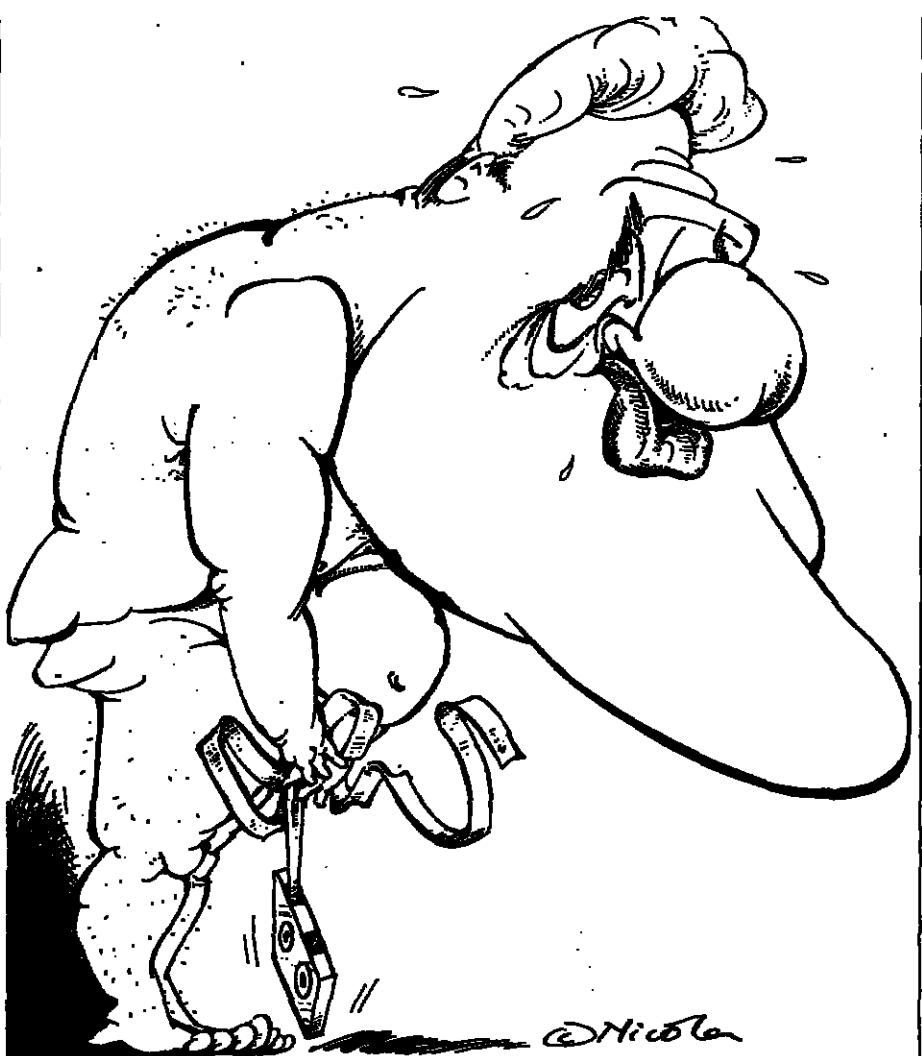
From Hope to shame

THESE should have been golden times for William Jefferson Clinton. One year into his second term, the man from Hope — who dedicated his entire life to becoming president — could finally have set about turning that ambition into achievement. Now was his moment to make some history. Settled in the Oval Office, freed of the need to please the electorate — whom he shall never face again — the president could finally have started implementing his vision of America. Next week was meant to be just such a moment, delivering his annual State of the Union address — buoyed by polls showing his popularity through the roof and with the US economy surging ahead.

Instead Bill Clinton has died with advisers, fretting about the accusations of a 24-year-old office junior, his gift to historians less likely to be a doctrine for the 21st century than a trove of juicy tales of kismet and fate, down to the Internet rumour about semantised underwear — said to have been kept by Monica Lewinsky as DNA proof of her intimacy with the presidential seed. At stake is the prize which has animated Bill Clinton from boyhood: the presidency of the United States.

It makes a gripping story of sex, lies and audacity. At the heart of it stands Lewinsky, one of the thousands of eager young things who work for free in the machinery of the US government. Moved from the White House to the Pentagon in 1996, she was befriended by one Linda Tripp — a leftover from the Bush presidency, and no stranger of Bill. Ms Lewinsky proceeded to pour her heart out to her older colleague.

She told of an 18-month affair with the president, describing in graphic detail her encounters with the man she called "the big guy" — recalling the chief executive's fondness for telephone sex in the wee small hours of the morning. What Monica Lewinsky didn't realise was that while her confessions were being recorded, Linda Tripp recorded every word of those conversations, collecting 20



hours of damning evidence. On their own, the tapes would simply prove that Bill Clinton had had yet another extra-marital affair. That's hardly headline news to an American people who accepted long ago that their president has sexual appetites to match his other, gargantuan drives: remember, this is the man who can eat an apple in one bite.

But what has pushed the latest rumour into a different, graver category is Ms Lewinsky's claim — also on tape — that Mr Clinton and his faithful Mr. Fixit, Vernon Jordan, pressured her to lie about the affair under oath. That counts as "suborning

perjury" and obstruction of justice — the very terrain where Richard Nixon eventually met his fate.

Impeachment is the word of the hour in Washington now, just as it was then. But cooler heads are not yet convinced. For, however embarrassing the current torrent of claims, they don't yet include the "smoking gun" needed to topple a president. If the tapes consist solely of Monica Lewinsky telling her story, Bill Clinton can just set his work against her: she says they had an affair, he denies it. If there are recordings of the president's voice cooing into Ms Lewinsky's answer-

phone, as latest reports suggest, they might prove her case and expose Clinton as a liar, but would still not count as grounds for impeachment. What's missing is a tape or document of the president himself urging the former employee to lie under oath — the ingredient that finally ensured Nixon's resignation. Without that, Bill Clinton can probably keep his job.

The current American climate also protects him. If Ronald Reagan was the Teflon president, the American people are now the Teflon electorate — no matter what the president does, it bounces off them. They have seen a

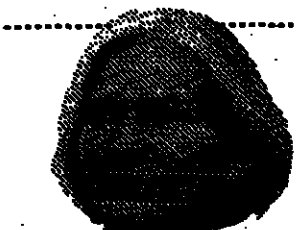
succession of "gates" opened on the Clinton White House — Whitewatergate, Travelgate, Fagate, and yet they have seemed both bored and bored. Clinton's Republican opponent, Bob Dole, used to pound the podium in desperation: "Where's the outrage in America?" It's as if, after Vietnam and Watergate, Americans have become so cynical about high authority, they expect the worst of their leaders. They have lost their ability to be shocked.

The Watergate factor helps Clinton in another, more unexpected way. The near-impeachment of a president was a trauma for the United States, one which disgraced not just Richard Nixon but politics itself. Few members of the US governing class, outside of Nixon, not even Republicans, have the stomach for a second great national rupture, one generation on.

EVEN so, the saga now unfolding in Washington may well represent the final days of the Clinton presidency — if not technically, then in spirit and heart. The voters who were prepared to forgive past indiscretions may take a different view of adultery inside the White House. Some will regard Ms Lewinsky's youth as a line that should not have been crossed — not by a man who has just sent his 18-year-old daughter to college. One commentator noted yesterday that every parent in America has a child who's done work experience somewhere. They expect bosses to abide by a golden rule: "You don't do the interns."

In a nation ultra-sensitive to sexual harassment, Bill Clinton is accused of an almost cartoon case: the least powerful woman in the office pursued by the most powerful man in the world. They will see their president not as the father of the nation he wished to be, but as a red-faced leech who can't keep it zipped. With or without impeachment, the most talented campaigner and politician of recent times now looks likely to end his presidency having achieved nothing more than keeping his job.

Cheering up the Cubans



Isabel Hilton

MICHAEL Ranneberger, the US State Department official in charge of Cuba, was addressing an increasingly exasperated press corps in the fortress-like US interests section in Havana. Why, the journalists were asking him, when the US deals with China, sends aid to North Korea and is an ally of Saudi Arabia, should Cuba be singled out for a 35-year-long economic blockade that prohibits even the sale of food, and has singularly failed in its stated objective — to bring

down Fidel Castro? Ranneberger was repeating his mantras with a hypnotic determination. The US does not have a one-size-fits-all policy. The US will consider lifting the embargo when there is real systemic change in Cuba. The US is supported by the European Union and its allies in Latin America in seeking change in Cuba. The more he spoke, the more Mr Ranneberger sounded like a hard-line member of a fringe political party, detached from reality but deeply immersed in dogma.

Positions are set in cold war concrete in this argument. For Fidel, the wicked imperialists are attempting genocide on the Cuban people; for the US, the Communist tyrant Fidel must go before Cuba can be released from the chains of the embargo.

The absurdity is, as almost anyone on this long-suffering island will tell you, that it is now the em-

bargo above all that is keeping Fidel's political system together.

The embargo shields him from responsibility for the consequences of the revolution's follies and keeps the nationalist card always close to the top of the pack. Cubans may not believe in revolutionary fairy stories any more, but they can still recognise an old colonial power when they see one, and they have no desire to exchange even Fidel's Communist Party for the vengeance of the Miami exiles.

Meanwhile, beautiful Havana is crumbling away, and professional salaries are worth the equivalent of fifty US cents a day — enough to buy a bottle of milk. It was worse in 1992, when such salaries plunged to \$4 a month, but it still does not sustain life.

Cubans — at least those outside the privileged elite — must find other ways of staying alive. Young and pretty ones have become

prostitutes in such large numbers that socialist Cuba is now one of the world's major sex-tour destinations. Others steal from their state employers: factory workers pilfer the goods they produce to barter on the black market; Internet providers do private side deals with customers, state drivers siphon off the petrol to sell it to stranded motorists. Householders live behind freshly erected iron grilles to protect what they have from the assault of those who have less.

OTHERS have just dropped out of professions that can no longer sustain life: a university professor takes a job as a bell boy because the hard currency tips bring in many times the state salary. An ex-employee of the government opens a tiny restaurant in his living room, selling illegal seafood behind gates that are padlocked against an unannounced visit from the police. They may not be the professions they envisaged

as idealistic young students in Cuba's universities, but at least it puts flesh back on faces grown thin in the long emergency. Few can see any future beyond the daily effort of scraping a living from the exhausted soil of the revolution. No wonder they are flocking to church.

Cubans have been waiting for the Pope's visit as wanderers stranded in a desert might wait for a drink of water. They don't think it will make the desert bloom, or even show them the way back to fertile ground. But they hope it will soothe their parched throats for a while and allow them to feel a touch less alone.

Dumb up



A rare interview with Jeanette Winterson ♦ Can Britain and Germany ever agree? ♦ Where do you want to go today, Microsoft? ♦ In praise of Darwinian psychology ♦ Garrison Keillor: a new short story ♦ Foreign aid: money well-spent? ♦ After the East Asia crisis, has the West won?

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Chaim Bermant

Jewish wit and mischief

WITH his wild bushy beard, powerful physical frame and strong Glaswegian accent, Chaim Bermant, who has died aged 68, appeared an unlikely prophetic figure. But unlike the old Hebrew prophets he amused, delighted and charmed his readers as much with his often wickedly witty prose as he castigated and infuriated them.

Bermant appeared to be larger than life, fearless in his denunciations of failures and shortcomings in Jewish life here and in Israel. Aware that Jews hate to see their shortcomings described in the non-Jewish media but take a delight in reading about them in their own press, he used the columns of the Jewish Chronicle for a weekly bombardment on persons and policies he found distasteful.

His often vituperative comments on the ultra-Orthodox and even rabbis who failed his test of tolerance or the misadventures of the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and a wide variety of other subjects, Jewish and non-Jewish, provoked a large correspondence, mostly critical. But even those who seemingly regarded him as ignorant attacks accepted that Bermant had such a brilliant and incisive pen, aided by a wide, almost encyclopaedic knowledge, with a thoroughly Jewish background and heart that his foibles could be forgiven.

Bermant liked to say that he spoke "the Queen's Yiddish", but to many he was equally unintelligible in Scottish, English or Yiddish. His origins in Poland and Latvia added a further problem to his speech patterns but provided a very rich tapestry and mosaic for his columns, his

novels and his serious well-researched books. He was born in Breslev, a Polish frontier town, but when he was four the family moved to Barokiv in Latvia and emigrated to Glasgow when he was eight. The fact that his father was a rabbi who considered himself unfairly treated by his more successful colleagues in Glasgow, probably explained some of the surprising bitterness with which Bermant criticised religious leaders in Britain and in Israel — attacks which were greatly resented.

Many considered him very unfair to the present Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks. In a typical one-sentence putdown he managed to annoy not one but two Chief Rabbis when he wrote that he did not expect much from Lord Jakobovits before his appointment and was pleasantly surprised, but with Rabbi Sacks it was just the opposite.

BERMANT obtained his religious and secular knowledge by studying at Glasgow Yeshiva (Talmudic College), at Glasgow University and the London School of Economics. He was even, unhappily for a time, a teacher.

But at the age of 15 he was already writing stories and he became a voluminous novelist, expressing a broad Jewish humour and the traditional Jewish preoccupations and hang-ups. His heroes and heroines never appear to achieve their aims, though everyone around them is trying desperately to bring about a little bit of happiness. Some novels as *Jericho Sleep Alone* and *Her Endless Lesson*, are filled with unfulfilled dreams and failed endeavours. Only his non-fiction books, such as *Troubled Eden*, about the Anglo-Jewish Community

in Britain and *The Cousinhood*, which deals with the Anglo-Jewish aristocracy, a subject made for Bermant's love for creating mischief, were consistently successful. Yet there were many who thought that Bermant's novels were underestimated and that with luck he could have become another Isaac Bashevis Singer, the Yiddish Nobel Prize winner.

In the late 1950s Bermant became a scriptwriter for Scottish Television and then for Granada Television in Manchester. From 1964-66 he was features editor of the Jewish Chronicle. But it was only when he began to write his regular column for the page, first under the pen name of Ben Azai and then under his own name and photo, that he became the best known and most controversial figure in Anglo-Jewish life.

Having been a member of the religious Zionist youth group Bnei Akiva in Glasgow, Bermant twice tried to settle in Israel and twice returned.

His wife Judy Weil, whom he married in 1962, and with whom he had two sons and two daughters, had a major effect on his life. She gently shepherded him to a greater attachment to Judaism, so that he did not travel on Saturdays and ate only kosher food. Perhaps too, she taught him to be more tolerant, but she failed to diminish his liking for cigarettes and whisky.

What the Jewish community will now miss is the weekly dose of the Bermant vitriol which they have come to hate and love. They will miss it as they would Sabbath eve candles.

Joseph Flankstone

Chaim Bermant, novelist and columnist, born February 26, 1929; died January 20, 1998



Bermant... weekly bombardment on persons he found distasteful PHOTO: JOHN WILDOOSE

Sir Alexander Oppenheim

Maths lessons in Changi

SIR Alexander Oppenheim, who has died aged 94, was captured after the fall of Singapore in 1942 and incarcerated in the infamous Changi prison of war camp where 30 highly qualified and dedicated men, six of them former professors and most with first class degrees, established a POW university. Oppenheim was the dean and head of mathematics.

He and his colleagues persuaded the Japanese commandant to provide a lorry and allow the prisoners to collect books from the Raffles College Library. Most subjects, except classics and modern languages, were offered but there were far too many applicants for the 600 places available in the small block allocated, with its dozen classrooms.

The basic entry requirement, the old "school certificate", was followed by an interview biased towards younger men whose education had been interrupted by the war — Lance Bombardier Oppenheim had to inform a certain brigadier that he had not been accepted. A paper shortage precluded written assignments, but there was no obstacle to discussion groups. The university provided a strong antidote to despondency.

Before the end of the third term, most of the fitter men, including Oppenheim, were granted the college full university status. He submitted his papers written in Raffles College days to Oxford and was awarded a DSc degree in 1954. In 1957 Oppenheim became vice-chancellor — a post he retained until he retired in 1971 — and he oversaw the establishment of the new campus and a teaching hospital in Kuala Lumpur.

"Oppie", as he was known to his colleagues and students, was a modest, courteous and popular teacher. Awarded the CBE in 1965, he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh the following year and knighted in 1961. The highest Malaysian honour was bestowed on him in 1963 by the Malaysian Head of State. However he did not retire, becoming visiting professor at Reading University (1965-68), and head of the mathematics departments of the University of Ghana (1968-78) and the University of Benin, Nigeria (1973-77).

Oppenheim, a courageous, gentle and special man, will be remembered for his generous spirit and wise advice. He is survived by his second wife, Margaret, a daughter from his first marriage and two sons.

Eric Miller

Alexander Oppenheim, mathematician, born February 4, 1903; died December 13, 1997

Birthdays

Dame Mary Arden, High Court Judge, chairman, Law Commission, 51; Princess Caroline of Monaco, 41; Lord Dunsany, former Master of the Rolls, 83; Paula Hamilton, actress and model, 37; Rutger Hauer, actor, 54; Phillip Knightley, author

CORRECTIONS AND CLARIFICATIONS

SEVERAL readers point out that a pocket cartoon on page 19, January 21, showing two characters puzzling over the rewriting of a ping, was potentially confusing and dangerous to anyone unfamiliar with the correct procedure. Please, don't do it at home.

IN OUR review of the Elliott Carter Clarinet Concerto, (page 14, 22, January 21), we

mistakenly said "the remarkable David Campbell" was the soloist. In fact it was Michael Collins. Apologies to both.

It is the policy of the Guardian to correct errors as soon as possible. Readers may contact the office of the Readers' Editor, Ian Mages, by telephoning 01753 239 9899 between 11am and 5pm, Monday to Friday. Fax: 01753 239 9897. E-mail: reader@guardian.co.uk

Death Notices

BEYRON, John, aged 11, died at home on 20th January 1998. He was the beloved son of Mrs. Mary and the late Mr. John Beyron. He was a member of the St. John's Church, St. John's, and was a member of the St. John's School, St. John's. He was a very kind and gentle boy, and will be missed by all who knew him. Burial at St. John's Church, St. John's, on 23rd January 1998 at 11am. Family flowers only. Donations may be sent to St. John's Church, St. John's, or to the St. John's School, St. John's. Mrs. Mary Beyron, 11, St. John's Church, St. John's, or to the St. John's School, St. John's.

CHARLES CRAD, died 23rd January 1997, in loving memory of a beloved husband and father, who's early passing, Dorothy and family.

870 place your own memorial notice here. Tel: 01753 239 9897 or 01753 239 9898 between 11am and 5pm, Monday to Friday.

Jack Lord

'Book' em, Danno, Murder One

NOBODY did more to publicise the natural attractions of Hawaii than actor Jack Lord, who has died of a heart attack aged 77. As the star and executive producer of the CBS-TV series *Hawaii Five-O*, which was filmed entirely on location in the Hawaiian islands during its 12-year, 264-episode lifespan, he became a globally-recognised ambassador for the region in his screen persona of top cop Steve McGarrett. The *Hawaii Five-O* police force was a fictional creation, but seemed so authentic that Lord once received a request from what he described as a responsible government agency for its assistance in tracing a wanted criminal.

Lord was born in an immigrant neighbourhood of Brooklyn, New York. From an early age he mixed artistic endeavour with action pursuits, becoming an accomplished painter whose works have been exhibited in Washington's Corcoran Gallery and New York's National Academy of Design and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. He won a football scholarship to New York University, where he majored in art. He followed family tradition, his father was a steamship company executive — by working on merchant ships as a seaman and licensed mate for four years,



Lord as Steve McGarrett... the most dislikeable policeman ever seen on TV PHOTO: BFI

and spent a year in Persia building roads and bridges for the US Engineers.

Having decided to become an actor, he studied for three years at New York's Neighborhood Playhouse, paying his way by working as a Cadillac salesman during the day. After a stint at New York's Actors Studio, Lord appeared on the Broadway stage in *The Traveling Lady* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* before uprooting himself to Hollywood. He was not destined to become a major film actor — his best-known big screen appearance is as the CIA man Felix Leiter in the James Bond film, *Dr No* — and it was a prolonged time before he established himself in television. Not that he wasn't offered opportunities. He once estimated that he turned down 22 TV series because he felt they weren't

right for him, including leading roles in *Wagon Train* and *Ben Casey*.

In 1962, Lord thought he had found the perfect vehicle when he got the role of Stoney Burke, in an ABC-TV series about a rodeo rider. Lord, who was becoming known for reciting pious poetry and talking himself exceedingly seriously, commented that Burke was "a man of great depth. He is a man close to God, without ever mentioning it."

The series was dropped after only one season. When *Hawaii Five-O*'s creator Leonard Freeman cast Lord as Steve McGarrett, the actor was determined to exploit the opportunity to the full. McGarrett was perhaps the most dislikeable policeman ever seen on TV, square-jawed, cold-eyed and humourless. However, his "book 'em,

Danno, Murder One" punch-line became famous.

Lord drove himself and the cast with ruthless efficiency, and when Freeman died Lord assumed his executive producer's role. The show became an institution in Hawaii, bringing in large amounts of studio production money and stimulating tourism. After the show ceased production in 1980 Lord and his wife Marie continued to live in their beachfront condominium in Honolulu's Kalahele district. He had been suffering from Alzheimer's disease, and was too ill to appear in a CBS pilot for a new *Hawaii Five-O* series last April.

Adam Sweeting

Jack Lord (John Joseph Patrick Ryan), actor, born December 30, 1920; died January 21, 1998

Colin Franklin

Doctor who strove to heal a community

FOR Dr Colin Franklin, who has died aged 77, an abiding childhood memory was of the rope dividing the main streets of his birthplace, Bridgetown, the capital of Barbados, one side was for white people, the other for black. Most of his working life was spent as a general practitioner in Hackney, where he demonstrated that there was more than one way to heal a community.

In the early 1960s he co-founded Hackney's Community Relations Council with Dudley Dryden and went on to become involved in all Hackney's major health, ethnic and policing issues. He was a lay inspector of local police stations, helped establish Hackney's black and ethnic minority working group, and played a big part in setting up Romerton Hospital's ethnic unit.

In 1968 Smithfield meat markets marched in support of Enoch Powell's "Rivers of Blood" speech, Franklin's reaction, backed by Hackney's then mayor Stanley Clinton-Davis and Dr David Pitt, was to form Accord, an organisation aimed at healing the racial divide.

Franklin qualified as a doctor in 1953. His wife June, a nurse, died in 1967. He is survived by their daughter, Dr Paula Franklin, a former public health adviser to President Clinton.

John Oakes

Colin Franklin, doctor, born February 17, 1920; died December 5, 1997



Colin Franklin... patients clamoured to get on his list

Road, Hackney. He was soon offered a partnership.

In his tiny surgery Franklin was a one-man band, with people clamouring to get on his list, because he was a superb clinician and a wonderful, devoted man, with a constant smile and sense of fun. He retired in 1990.

With his friend David Pitt — the first Caribbean peer — Franklin was a warrior against racial discrimination. They were also companions in the Warner stand at Lord's as prominent supporters of the West Indies.

Franklin was awarded the CBE in 1983. His wife June, a nurse, died in 1967. He is survived by their daughter, Dr Paula Franklin, a former public health adviser to President Clinton.

John Oakes

Colin Franklin, doctor, born February 17, 1920; died December 5, 1997

Jackdaw



Swampy I

LIKE the present-day motorway protesters, Victorian environmental radicals were glamorous figures to their followers, who often resorted to direct action tactics to achieve their aims.

Recent work on Victorian environmental radicals in Britain in the 1870s has stressed the broader history of popular campaigns to defend the open ground. Here the precedents for the current wave of eco-radicalism are striking. Strong parallels may be drawn between the anti-motorway protestors of recent years, and the radical pressure groups who opposed

enclosure of open ground and common land in the middle years of the nineteenth century.

"Like the modern day 'Donna tribesmen', the eco-warriors of the nineteenth century favoured direct action tactics to impede the spread of avaricious estate owners and railway companies that sought to deprive people of access to the land. The fiercest battles of the 1870s were fought over the large areas of unenclosed waste and common land to the north and south of London where suburban development was planned and the pressures of urban growth were at their most severe. Victorian eco-warriors, in *History Today*.

Changing times

THE first steps in the story of human evolution took a billion years. The next step — nervous systems and brains — took a few hundred million years. The next steps, including the development of language, took less than a million years. And the most

recent steps seem to be taking only a few decades. The process is feeding on itself and becoming increasingly rapid. And now we are beginning to depend on computers so the process can run much faster. That's what's so confusing — technologies are feeding back on themselves; we're taking off. We're at that point analogous to when single-celled organisms were turning into multi-celled organisms. We are amoebae and we can't figure out what the hell this thing is that we're creating.

I cannot believe that we are at the end of this story — we are not evolution's ultimate product. There's something coming after us and I imagine it is something wonderful. But we may never be able to comprehend it, any more than a caterpillar can comprehend turning into a butterfly.

Wired magazine on the process of human metamorphosis.

Buffet car

TAKEAWAYS are not such a new idea. In 1871, eight years

before the first restaurant car ran in Britain, a caterer had the bright idea of selling food hampers to railway travellers. By 1875, the Midland Railway itself was offering meals in baskets: two menus were available, priced at two and three shillings (10p and 15p respectively), the latter providing half a chicken, ham or tongue, salad, cheese, bread and butter, plus half a bottle of Claret or Burgundy. Railway catering got a bad press, even in those days. In



Wired: computer amoebas

1903, *Tourist* magazine complained that, at sixpence (2½p) for "tea and two slices of bread" and two slices of ham, the Great Northern Railway's tea basket was "not value for money"; and the L&NWR's tea was found to be "insufficiently hot but unnecessarily strong". Food baskets survived until world war two; then food shortages, disappearing crockery, buffet cars and Great Western Railway's revolutionary waxed-cardboard "Light Lunch Box", saw them off. And from there it was just a small step to the expanded polystyrene cup of tea, priced at 14 shillings and fivepence (72p), now available to take away from Euston.

How the British Rail sandwich got its reputation, in *Condé Nast Traveler*.

DJ Power

THE nerve centre of any club is its DJ booth. Here, behind the decks and mixer, is where the energy that propels a successful night is generated. However it is also the origin of much bad feeling because

it's one of the places where women are treated as second class citizens. While on the dance floor ladies can be seen in the proportion that they represent, in the booth male DJs outnumber their female counterparts by around 25 to 1. Those women who do defy the odds and get a booking have to accept lower fees than men and should never expect top billing.

Perhaps this inequality hasn't occurred to you before — nobody visits a club to contemplate the sexual politics of the dance scene after all — but away from the intensity and self-indulgence of nightclubs, things still look bleak. *Girl Power* is set to be a hit in the DJ booth, says dance music magazine *Dream*.

Work it out

FEW of us give our brains a chance to shine. Scientists estimate that we use at most 10 per cent of this complex organ's range and some of us use as little as 1 per cent. But a little time spent letting our brains "play" can give us a host of benefits...

From childhood the brain learns to catalogue information. This is essential, but it can deaden creativity.

Try the following exercise for a couple of weeks to give your brain a jolt. Make a list of 21 activities you carry out each day and note how you undertake them. Now reverse three of these. For example, brush your teeth with your other hand, drive with the radio off, and on, read the newspaper from back to front. Next day, do three more activities; for example take a shower in the evening instead of the morning and so on.

You should aim to do as many things as differently as possible to achieve a feeling of disorientation. It's this feeling that leads to creativity. How to give your brain a workout, in *She*.

Jackdaw wants jewels. E-mail: jackdaw@guardian.co.uk; fax: 01753 239 9897; or the Jackdaw, The Guardian, 119 Farringdon Road, London EC1R 3ER.

Hannah Pool

OUTLOOK/City sees billionaire software genius as planning European telecoms link

Gates nightmare for BT regulator

Simon Beavis
and Nicholas Bannister

It could be a regulator's ultimate nightmare: Bill Gates — the smiling computer software genius who makes no secret of his ambition to dominate the communications age — meets British Telecom, one of the world's biggest in telecoms.

Worse, BT chooses Rupert Murdoch's BSkyB as its favoured partner to help it become a key player in the multimedia world.

This was the vision conjured up by speculators yesterday as rumours started swirling around the City that Microsoft — worth more than £100 billion — was about to launch a bid for BT, itself no slouch at £27 billion.

The important question, lost in the stock market fever

which saw BT's shares, already on the rise for a week, soar by another 25p, was — did it make any sense?

History says that BT needs a dramatic deal with one of its big international rivals after a string of failed attempts to build itself into a truly global group. It tried to take over Cable & Wireless, but failed.

Like all other large players, BT needs to enter three key markets — Europe, the US and Asia. As one senior industry executive put it recently: "If you don't have a global alliance you will not exist in the next decade."

The industry assumption has been that BT would have

to link up with another phone company. Until last week few took seriously the possibility that BT would be anything but in the driving seat. But then the City started to cast its eye on the possibility of a takeover of its Government golden share, as a potential takeover victim.

Few thought that the tie

Clearly not a match made in heaven, as culture clash awaits

would be with a software group. But if an all-out takeover looks unlikely, there could be good reasons for an alliance to spur the long-awaited convergence of computing and communications.

Bill Gates is in no doubt about where his company is

heading. "The fact that Microsoft has been a leader in the PC era should mean that we won't be a leader in the communications era. I'd like to defy that tradition," he wrote in his book *The Road Ahead*.

He believes the communications era will not come of age until countries have built high-capacity information

superhighways and he has been busy buying in to cable companies in the US and taking over the specialist group

BT has talked about spending up to £15 billion on building a British superhighway but has done nothing

about it. Now it needs to act since the government ban preventing it from broadcasting entertainment through its established network may be lifted in 2000.

Digital technology now promises the prospect of real interactive services through TV and computers. And if BT wants to be a player it could hardly choose better than Mr Gates. This would be especially so if BT is forced by Brussels to quit its BSB TV venture with BSkyB.

But it is clearly not a match made in heaven. An all-out Microsoft bid for BT could lead to a culture clash. Mr Gates, highly entrepreneurial, is no natural soulmate of the somewhat formal Sir Iain Vallance, the BT chairman.

A cash bid would cost even rich Microsoft dear and a share exchange could see BT shareholders ending up with

more than a quarter of Mr Gates' empire. A more logical approach would be for Mr Gates to splash out on a stake to back a joint venture. In the past year he has spent up to \$1 billion at a time for stakes in the US cable industry.

Mr Gates is known to be hovering over the British market; his lawyers have visited telecoms watchdogs Don Crickshank to sound out UK regulation. But he would need to spend \$6 billion to secure 10 per cent.

Still, access to BT's Marlow research laboratories could be valuable, as would a springboard for the UK and European markets. But the likelihood is that he would prefer to continue to work with BT on a project basis

as in the campaign to put UK schools on the Internet.

It is clear that BT needs him more than he needs BT.

Getting together?

Microsoft BT

£7.0bn £14.9bn
£2.3bn Profits £3.2bn
£100bn

Head Office London
130,000

World's biggest companies

Ranking Market value, \$bn

1 Microsoft 142.3

2 Royal Dutch/Shell (Netherlands) 116.4

3 Exxon Corp (US) 96.7

4 Coca-Cola (US) 94.6

5 Intel Corp (US) 94.2

The rupiah plumbs new depths

Asia in turmoil

John Aglionby in Jakarta

INDONESIA is expected to impose controls on foreign exchange dealings in the next few days to rescue its free-falling currency. The rupiah plumped new depths yesterday as analysts said a *de facto* debt moratorium now existed in the world's fourth most populous country.

A Finance Ministry spokesman did not deny speculation that foreign exchange controls were being seriously considered. "Let's just wait and see another day or so," he said.

Yesterday the rupiah slumped from 11,700 to the US dollar to 16,300, before heavy state bank intervention helped it rally to 12,000 by the close. The carnage not only spread to the Jakarta Stock Exchange, which fell 4.1 per cent, but across the whole of

South-east Asia. Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines and Hong Kong were all hit by the fallout, with their currencies and stock markets exiting the downward slide.

The beleaguered Indonesian currency has now lost more than 80 per cent of its value since the crisis began last July.

"The demand for dollars is beginning to dry up a little as more and more companies have effectively said 'enough is enough'," a dealer with ING Barings said. "What we basically have now is a *de facto* debt moratorium. Companies don't want to go completely under so they are refusing to repay what they owe."

Official data puts Indonesia's private-sector debt at more than \$65 billion (\$38 billion), with \$20 billion owed this year. The public sector debt at \$75 billion. "These are gross underesti-

mations," an economist with KPMG said. "The total is probably more than \$200 billion."

Ministers are refusing to declare a debt moratorium. Instead, they are going to announce a series of banking-sector reforms in the next few days and another package of measures to deal with the country's debt crisis within 10 days, according to Dennis

de Tray, head of the World Bank's Jakarta office.

It is thought the latter package would involve offshore lenders, local companies and, possibly, the international community. However, foreign governments are currently loath to throw money into the seemingly bottomless mire of Indonesia's indebted corporate sector.

Indonesia's political instability is exacerbating the economic crisis. Much of Wednesday's losses came about because the markets reacted negatively to speculation that President Suharto wants his next vice president to be Research and Technology Minister Dr BJ Habibie, who does not have a good reputation abroad.

International confidence in Indonesia has eroded further since the \$43 billion IMF deal was announced as fears mount that promised reforms will again either be delayed or discarded to prevent further job losses — estimated at four million in the past six months — and social unrest.

End of road for curb on Japanese car exports

Martin Walker in Brussels

THE European car industry has agreed to end eight-year old voluntary restraint on Japanese car imports, despite the threat of a new export wave after the devaluation of the yen.

The agreement with Japan will not be extended beyond the planned expiry date, on December 31, 1999, even if some members of the European Automobile Manufacturers Association want it to. Its president, Bernd Fischer, said at a press conference here yesterday.

The short-term threat of cheap Japanese and Asian imports had to be set against the need for a long-term European strategy of supporting free trade and open markets, he argued.

The European industry's share of the world car market had stabilised at 37 per cent, and, with an almost 5 per cent rise last year in European manufacturers' share of the European market, the industry was solidly placed to compete at home.

The voluntary restraint agreement held down Japanese exports and also encouraged Japanese firms to invest in European assembly plants. This led to more than \$2 billion of direct Japanese investment in Britain, and a new \$400 million Toyota plant at Valenciennes, in France.

Further rate rises not ruled out

Larry Elliott and
Charlotte Denny

BANK of England Governor Eddie George yesterday said that the Asian economic crisis would have a far bigger impact on the global economy than has so far been acknowledged.

Mr George said that the knock-on effects of the financial turbulence in the Pacific would help to dampen inflationary pressures in Britain, but only up to a point.

And, with the Bank concerned about overheating in those parts of the domestic economy sheltered from international competition, the Governor was careful to avoid suggesting that events in Asia had put a block on a sixth post-election increase in rates.

Industry leaders warned yesterday that the economy was at a turning point. Unveiling its quarterly report on the state of the economy, the British Chambers of Com-

merce said the impact of recent rate rises was starting to show.

"A slowdown in growth is anticipated over the next quarter, with both manufacturing and service sector firms less confident of increasing their turnover," the BCC said.

In a speech to the British-American chamber of commerce, Mr George said that the International Monetary Fund had revised down its forecast of growth in the Group of Seven countries by 0.25 percentage points to

2.25 per cent this year, and by 2.5 percentage points in the Asian countries.

"My impression, notwithstanding these revisions, is most analysts would still see the risks as being quite heavily on the downside," he said.

The Governor praised the IMF's handling of the crisis and the willingness of the commercial creditor banks to roll over Korea's debt, but said that stabilisation was only the start of a process certain to have a "substantial economic aftershock".

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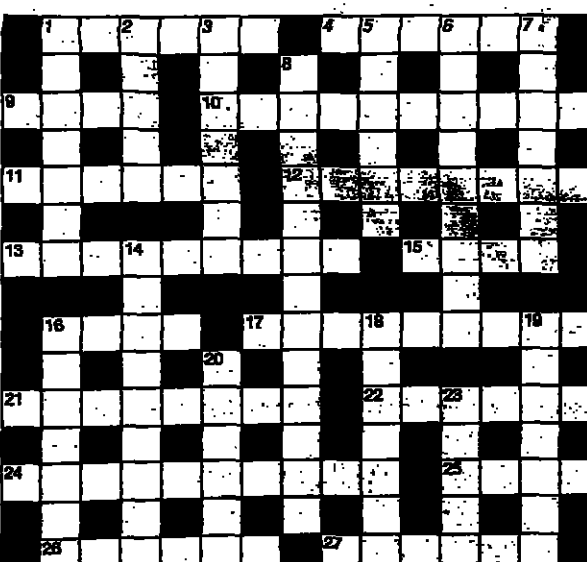
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An Indonesian security guard loads rupiah banknotes — not worth the paper they're printed on — into a steel box at the central bank.

PHOTOGRAPH BY NURHAN

Guardian Crossword No 21,179

Set by Janus



Across

- 1 Principles leading Lawrence to reject automatic weapon (6)
- 4 Madams of present-day sage? (6)
- 9 Part of regular chore for chief (4)
- 10 Means of judging a Shakespearean character (10)
- 11 Does he return unrefreshed from holiday? (6)
- 12 He was turned into a tree with irregular hip fruit (8)
- 13 Personality revealed in letter (6)
- 15 Pictorial weapon (4)
- 16 Junk seen at Oriental gallery (4)
- 17 Overcast, for example, tried out? (6)
- 21 Fashionable party season for the 1820s (6)

Down

- 2 Cast heard from beginning to end (7)
- 2 Human dilemma for Hebrew prophet (5)
- 3 Gigantic bird Cain destroyed (7)
- 5 Writer overcoming first-class bloomer (6)
- 6 Angry swelling crowd (6)
- 7 Literary doctor heading to deal with fainting (6)

8 Soft folk try a tricky extra question (13)
14 Address drink problem's underlying principle (8)
16 A number of workers who may have to pay rent (7)
18 One who does not believe in fieldwork (7)
19 The pair with most wool? (7)
20 Union with the French complaint (6)
22 Slip quietly into sale perhaps (5)
23 Solution tomorrow

CROSSWORD SOLUTIONS 179

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Underside

Dan Atkinson

A COPY of the following wise words was spotted on an office wall somewhere in Threadneedle Street: "Management of the currency is ... just as flexible as the management of the tides, or the regulation of the stars or the winds."

Attributed to Richard Cobden, presumably one half of that well-known 19th-century double-act Cobden 'n' Bright, it was given in evidence to a parliamentary select committee in 1840, a mere 152 years before Bill and truly ... you get the picture.

HOMER Office minister Lord Williams was quick on his feet at Tuesday's announcement of his investigation into money-laundering, with special reference to Her Majesty's most excellent Duchy of Normandy (that's the Channel Islands to you PAYE tax).

Lord Williams' hard-hitting Hewlett-Packard probe would not, he said, cover tax evasion. Swift, subtle correction by a civil servant, who agreed that "fiscal offences" probably could be interpreted as relating to tax evasion — but certainly not to proper arrangements involving offshore trusts at arm's length from their UK beneficiaries, and set up by (to take a random example) glamorous ladies from Belgium.

IN the worst possible taste, terrible Japanese bank jokes are groaning their way round the City. Examples as follows: "Did you hear about the Original bank? ... They've failed!"



"The Sumo Bank has gone belly-up"; "The Bonsai bank has had to cut back branches"; And the Gelsa Bank, it's well and truly ... you get the picture.

WAS it not a Japanese prime minister, back in the mid-80s, whose apology for offensive remarks about America's racial mixture was even more offensive than his original blather? Likewise, it seems, Bill Ennery, assistant director of such-two-oh regulator Ofwat. His agency is in hot water for publishing hush-hush griff on water companies, but his "apology" mentions (a) Ofwat's plans to restrict companies' ability to mark material "confidential"; and (b) the proposed freedom-of-information rules that will force the companies to be more open.

EVEN the most unseasonal must have felt romantic twinges when the minister's milk monitor, Ed Balls, married Yvette Cooper MP. Had they not chosen Paris for the honeymoon? Alas, Ed 'n' Yve were not sipping champagne in La Belle Amore à la Bogart and Bergman, but gingering milk shakes at Euro Disney. Ah, yes, these foolish things ...

Are you getting 4.75% interest on your current account?

Citibank	4.75% gross
NatWest	2.0% gross
First Direct	0.3% gross
Midland	1.5% gross
Barclays	0.3% gross

PC Banking, free 24 hour phone banking and worldwide service with an outstanding interest rate. And enjoy a free return flight to Amsterdam when you open a Citibank Account. Call us anytime on 0800 00 88 00 and quote reference PGUAAR. Or visit our website <http://www.citibank.co.uk>

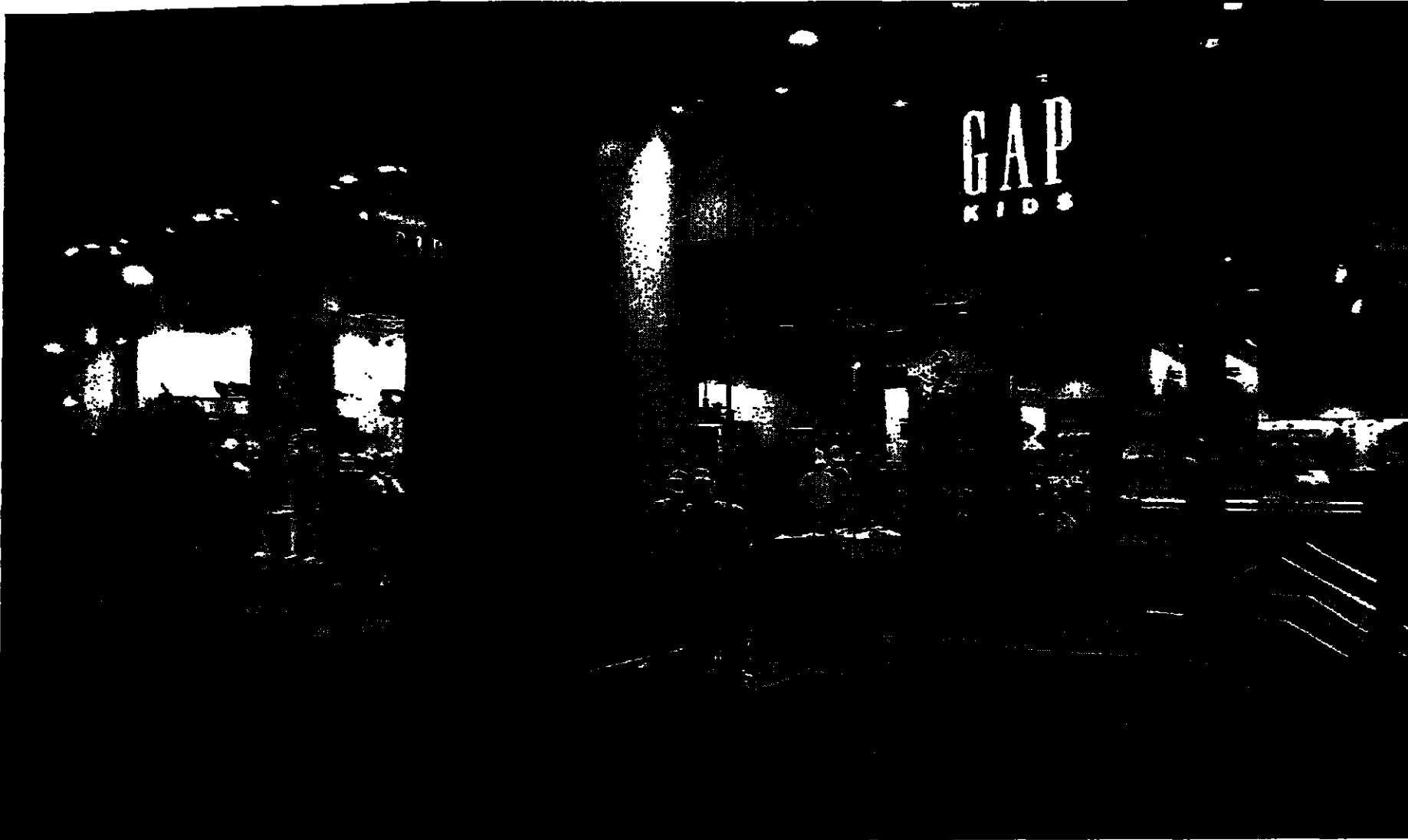
CITIBANK

*All competitive rates quoted are for Internet banking fully featured cheque accounts on balances of £2000 or above. Source: Money Week, December 1997. The gross rate is the rate of interest payable, not taking into account any deduction of income tax. Interest on the Citibank account is compounded daily and repaid monthly and the rate is variable. *All terms and conditions available upon request. Subject to purchase of airport tax and travel insurance. Deposits are made with Citibank International plc. Registered office 330 Strand, London WC2R 1HS. Registered mark of Citibank USA. Licensed member of Citibank New York USA.

Financial Editor: Alex Brummer
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FinanceGuardian

Fashion rivalry hots up ● Newsagent changes tack after feeble profit



Mind the Gap... fashion chain is set to launch concerted assault on the UK retail market with an expansion that will triple its nationwide outlets.

PHOTOGRAPH: GARY WEASER

200 new stores next for Gap

Peter Barton and
Pauline Springett

FASHION retailer Gap is set to open 200 new UK stores over the next two years, bringing its nationwide total to nearly 300. The expansion would enable Gap to engage in head-to-head competition with arch-rival Next.

Next has long been viewed by City analysts as vulnerable to competition from a serious operator as it has been concentrating on using outlets more effectively rather than increasing shops. Gap's expansion is understood to include outlets for all three of the group's stores — Gap, GapKids and BabyGap. It could also bring its up-market US chain Banana Republic across the Atlantic

to challenge Next. A Gap spokeswoman, however, denied that there are any plans to open Banana Republic stores in the UK before 2003. But she conceded that the company was planning up to 55 new store openings internationally this year, adding that Gap had opened in 25 locations in the UK over the past couple of years. It also operates in France, Germany and Japan.

Gap opened its first UK stores in 1985 and is firmly established in the south and in the nation's leading city shopping centres. The new stores are likely to be located in smaller high streets, according to this week's *Menswear Magazine*. UK managing director Carl Seletz declined to comment, but reluctance to go public about plans may stem from an unease about whether it is

the right time to be opening outlets in the UK. The news from Britain's high street has been patchy recently, with clothing and fashion stores going through a tough time. Last month Knickerbox, the specialist underwear shops, went into administration. Sears cut 700 jobs, and Austin Reed rescued the troubled Country Casuals with an agreed takeover.

Electrical retailer Tandy said yesterday that it is to shut 69 shops with the loss of up to 230 jobs, writes Mark Miller. The US-owned chain said loss-making stores were being closed in a "restructuring" after attempts to restore profitability had failed. Food group Birds Eye Wall's announced 200 job losses yesterday as it reorganised production at its Humber-side factories.

Notebook

No red carpet for Microsoft man



Alex Brummer

SINCE the start of this year the rise in BT shares has been nothing short of phenomenal.

This could be the market suddenly realising that a global telecoms company, extremely competitive in the European context, has been hopelessly undervalued on the London market, encouraging some smart arbitrage by US fund managers underweight in telecoms stock. BT is made even more attractive by the prospect that it will soon be £4.7 billion richer as a result of selling its stake in MCI once the US carrier deal with WorldCom is complete.

What really gingered up the market yesterday was the suggestion that BT might be conducting some exploratory talks with Bill Gates's MCI. Mr Gates may be on the retreat in the US, following the Justice Department's ruling on web browsers, but his ambition is far from fulfilled. He is determined to be at the cusp of the convergence taking place in the wired industries. In the US this has led Microsoft into deals with Comcast and cable operators in the US, on a relatively low scale basis.

It is also known that Microsoft was in London late last year exploring the regulatory environment and that departing Ofcom regulator Donald Cruickshank believes that this will be the next big challenge in multi-media.

An alliance with BT would give Microsoft more than a foothold in Europe, and it would open the possibility of Microsoft delivering Internet and wired services to every home in Britain — an attractive test market.

There are considerable downsides too: not least that BT's network is not based on the fibre optics technology needed to offer a broad band with the capacity to handle a huge range of digital services.

Nevertheless, the two companies together could counter the £10 billion-£12 billion investment required to do this. But, as is proving the case with SmithKline Beecham/American Home Products, and as was the case with BT/MCI, constructing the financial case can be a nightmare, if equity is to be involved.

Mr Gates would presumably not wish to dilute his personal stake, and BT as a smaller partner would be reluctant to be in his thrall. Finally, there are the regulatory implications. BT remains protected by a ban on overseas ownership of more than 20 per cent. Furthermore, there would be implications for other players. Although the UK is developing a more competitive and sophisticated wired marketplace, BT is still the dominant force, as is Microsoft in software technology.

Mr Gates may well be welcome around the small software houses of Cambridge, but not necessarily as an interloper on a grand international stage.

Asian reality

AT TIMES, in recent months, it has seemed as if UK policymakers have been only too happy to play down the impact of the Asian crisis on Western economies and the global financial system.

In November's pre-Budget statement by the Chancellor, Gordon Brown, it was rather airily dismissed. But a couple of months of turmoil and a series of spring financial meetings, starting with the G7 finance ministers' gathering in London on February 22 appear to have changed all that.

The most cogent analysis of how the UK now views the Asian crisis has come from the Bank of England Governor, Eddie George, in a speech to the Anglo-American Chamber of Commerce.

Mr George identifies three areas of concern which will have to be addressed by finance ministers and central bankers.

First, the position of Japan, the world's second largest economy. He notes that, in the face of recent instability, Japan appears to have taken the crucial decisions to stimulate domestic demand and to strengthen the financial system.

Secondly, Mr George suggests there is a case to be made for assistance to help the broader range of troubled Asian economies alleviate the most extreme of market movements such as those which hit the Indonesian rupiah yesterday. This will give the breathing space during which structural weaknesses in financial systems can be dealt with alongside unbridled macro-economic policies.

The third point is that the impact on the Western economies is almost certainly going to be larger than that estimated by the IMF economists in early December, when it was forecast that G7 growth next year would fall by only a quarter of one per cent as a result of the crisis.

The risk now is on a bigger downside, but not one which will stop the Bank of England raising UK rates a notch if domestic demand here is not slowing.

Debt retreat

THERE will no doubt be satisfaction in some quarters that in addition to the 80 per cent debt reduction agreed for Mozambique by the Paris Club of official creditors a further £170 million seems to have been raised in a series of side deals.

This, it is clearly hoped, will provide just enough relief to keep the debt initiative alive. But with a shortfall developing for Mozambique, and many other difficult countries to bring within the scheme by the year 2000, the Paris outcome looks mean and shortsighted.

John Menzies tries to sell off its undelivering shops

Lisa Buckingham
City Editor

JOHN Menzies wants to sell its entire loss-making retail business, salvaging the best part of 3,000 jobs, before the end of April, chief executive David Mackay said yesterday.

The sale of its chain of 232 shops may raise only slightly more than the

£50 million book value, and it is understood a company has been set up specifically for this deal.

The present managers, including managing director Stephen Robinson, will probably continue to run the operation. This appears to rule out bids from rival retailers such as W H Smith, Fourbuys, Martins, Asda and the Birmingham-based T&S.

Menzies said it could take longer to sell Early Learning Centre, the chain of toy shops it tried to offload last year.

Mr Mackay said the disposal could take five years but did not rule out retaining an equity stake in ELA, which he said was a strong brand, even though it will suffer a £10 million charge from the decision to pull out of nursery goods and

children's clothing immediately. The changes mean Menzies' only retail outlet will be the upmarket stationer Smythson of Bond Street.

Menzies will now concentrate entirely on distribution operations. The dramatic switch in direction came as the group announced profits of just £200,000 on sales of £711.6 million in the six

months to last November, down from a £2.6 million profit on turnover of £645.6 million the time before.

Distribution, which includes newspaper wholesaling, transport of computer games, and air cargo handling, made profits of £13.6 million on sales of £517.8 million. Mr Mackay said Menzies would attempt to drive fur-

ther into the £1 billion airline handling business with another deal at Heathrow next week. Its Heathrow joint venture with Luftansa may be extended to include the German carrier's alliance partners, such as United Air Lines, North West and Air Canada. Shares closed down 14p at 350p even though analysts supported the retail sale.

Blair urged to revive deal for Mozambique

Charlotte Denny
reports on moves to ease plight of poorest countries

TONY Blair was last night coming under mounting pressure from a coalition of church groups and aid agencies to revive an international debt relief deal for some of the poorest countries in the world, after creditor nations failed to agree on an urgent rescue package for Mozambique.

The Paris Club, whose members include the UK, the US and most major European countries, announced yesterday that they would not bend their rules on debt forgiveness to come up with the extra \$50 million (£210 million) needed to get Mozambique's debts down to a sustainable level.

Aid agencies denounced the decision last night, saying it threatened the future of the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative. Many of the 20 or so countries on the list for

debt relief will require debt forgiveness in excess of the club's 80 per cent rule.

"They are putting the credibility and future of HIPC under threat," said Ian Bray of Oxfam. "It's in stark contrast to the billions they've thrown at East Asia."

Jubilee 2000, an umbrella group of more than 70 aid charities, churches and other groups will tell a select committee of MPs today that the Prime Minister should use his turn in the chair of the Group of Seven richest countries to put debt forgiveness at the top of the agenda for May's G7 summit in Birmingham. "He should exert maximum pressure on other G7 leaders to cancel unpayable debt for the world's poorest countries by 2000," says the coalition's submission.

Britain has been one of the leading nations behind the HIPC initiative, but has been opposed within the Paris Club by other countries, including Germany, Italy and Japan. Sources last night said French officials prevented the club from even discussing the case of Mozambique.

Utilities row comes to boil

Celia Weston
Industrial Correspondent

ENERGY minister John Birtle was fighting last night to keep the lid on a damaging row between power supply companies and the regulators.

The row threatens not only to disrupt the privatised gas and electricity industries and the timetable for opening markets to competition, but provokes yet another Monopolies and Mergers Commission inquiry. It could also add costs to the more than £50 million in penalties companies already face because of

the delay in opening electricity markets to consumers.

The minister has agreed to a second meeting within a week to listen to electricity supply companies. Chief executives have told him they will not comply with regulators' demands that they should not sell customers cheap gas until the electricity markets themselves are open to competition. But doubt has been cast on the companies' ability to meet competition timetables. The confrontation, sparked by Ofgas and Ofgem, is embarrassing for No 10, and for Mr Birtle who was to ensure electricity competition began on time, in April. Earlier this

week he agreed a five-month delay on competition to supply 26 million electricity consumers. An estimated 4.5 million consumers can already switch suppliers.

The two industry watchdogs, which want to "prevent the different timetables from distorting competition", have given the 14 electricity suppliers and British Gas Trading until February 6 to sign a voluntary undertaking or face a Monopolies referral for anti-competitiveness. But the electricity companies want an MMC inquiry in to the dominant market position of Centrica, the demerged supply arm of the old British Gas.

Exchange is warned off companies that fail to kill the Bug

David Gow

COMPANIES could be forced to inform investors about their plans to deal with the "millennium bug" on their systems as a condition for getting or retaining a listing on the London Stock Exchange, Don Cruickshank, who heads a new government campaign, indicated yesterday.

Mr Cruickshank, chairman of Action 2000, inaugurating the £1 million awareness campaign about the computer problems associated with the year-2000 date, said he was discussing whether to impose such a condition with exchange officials and the Auditing Practices Board.

This emerged as a survey of 1,000 private and public sector bodies disclosed that 77 per cent of British businesses are not ready for the date switch. The problem arises because many computers' two-digit dating system cannot tell whether 00 relates to 2000 or 1900.

Mr Cruickshank is advising a special Cabinet committee on the issue set up by the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, who said yesterday: "One hundred working weeks is just enough time to tackle the problem. This is one deadline that can't be missed... This is one of the most serious problems facing British business and the global economy today."

Oil price fall fails to filter down

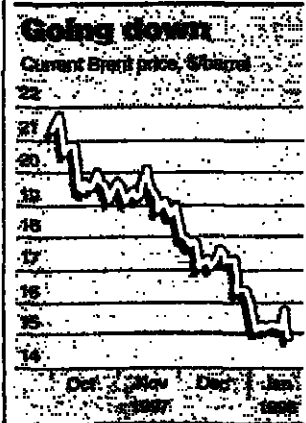
Laurie Laird

DRIVERS who remember the huge rise in petrol prices during the oil shocks of the 1970s may be forgiven for hoping that plunging crude oil prices will bring lower fuel bills.

World oil prices have fallen by 37 per cent over the past year, with the price of Brent crude slipping below \$15 a barrel yesterday, for the first time since April 1994.

Dealers blame a host of factors for falling world prices: reduced Asian demand, rising production in Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries, and falling demand for heating oil in a mild winter. Despite scattered evidence of small reductions in

petrol prices in some areas of the country, oil industry sources warn that falling oil prices will not bring drivers



significant relief at the pump. A barrel of Brent crude oil was priced approximately \$24 a barrel in January of last year, but tumbling prices have prompted only a marginal fall in petrol prices; British Petroleum said it has reduced prices by an average of 2p since September.

Petrol providers say their profit margins are far too small to contemplate cutting prices. "The fall in international gasoline prices has done no more than to restore a bit of margin," to the petrol companies, said Robert Ollie, director of Oil Price Assessments.

Industry sources complain that competition from supermarkets has forced traditional petrol retailers to operate with slimmer profit margins.

News in brief

Grade's bingo card marked

Michael Grade's initial year as chairman of First Leisure, a nightclub and fitness centres operator, has been marred by a poor performance from the bingo division, which he is expected to sell to its management for more than £45 million.

Analysts said a deal for the sale was close, noting that Bass sold its 130 bingo clubs last month for £275 million after taking a £177 million charge to write down the value of its bingo assets.

Mr Grade confirmed that a sale was one of the options being considered. Bingo income fell 23 per cent in the year, which resulted in a loss of £2 million. It suffered from a slowdown caused by the National Lottery.

Tin mine looks doomed

Hopes of preventing the closure of Cornwall's only remaining tin mine appeared to be fading fast yesterday as managers announced the first of the redundancies among 200 staff still on the payroll. The South Crofty mine near Redruth has been battling against closure since August

when the company's Canadian owners announced plans to cease production in the face of heavy losses.

A £12 million rescue package, involving a hoped for £4.7 million of government grants, has been held up because of failure to tie up a contract and Crofty's chief David Giddings said the mine would shut on March 6.

Lonrho drops JCI plan

Lonrho has dropped plans to buy South African mining group JCI after months of talks, but insisted yesterday that it is on course to complete a £200 million shares-for-goldmines deal with JCI and Anglo American Corp.

Lonrho wants to buy back a 26.1 per cent holding in its shares, now held by Anglo-Anglo will swap its Lonrho shares for two JCI goldmines. Lonrho will then buy the stake from JCI, and acquire its Tavistock coal mines.

British Midland in fray

EU Competition Commissioner Karel Van Miert said yesterday that British Midland has joined Virgin Atlantic in complaining to Brussels against BA's system of commissions and incentives for travel agents.

TOURIST RATES — BANK SELLS

Australia 2.43	France 9.64	Italy 2.862	Singapore 2.12
Austria 20.29	Germany 2.88	Malta 0.93	South Africa 7.52
Belgium 29.41	Greece 437.62	Netherlands 3.22	Spain 242.53
Canada 2.11	Hong Kong 12.25	New Zealand 2.77	Sweden 12.81
Cyprus 0.84	India 63.11	Norway 11.95	Switzerland 2.34
Denmark 11.06	Ireland 1.1489	Portugal 253.67	Turkey 339.360
Finland 8.81	Israel 5.85	Saudi Arabia 8.05	USA 1.5058

Supplied by Reuters Bank (excluding Indian rupee and Israeli shekel).